

jubilat

twelve

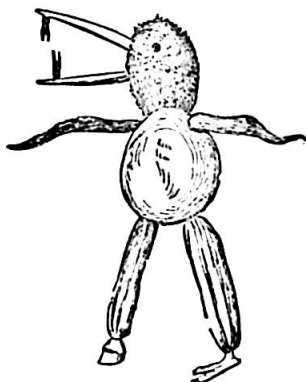
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I LOVE THEM AS I'M DEFYING THEM.

Monica Fambrough

I am the new colt.
I took the creamery road to the palace.
I took the chill-knob to be polished.
It was a lonely way.

My underside is beige and surprising
as the belly of a fire truck.
I took the creamery road.
I took the palace.

Tearing the grass with my black feet
I struck at the night with my firetruck neck
and found it once, the palace.

I am in it now alone.
I am precious like rosacea.
I stand for youth on my new knees
and I carried this flag the whole way.

I am several.
I am not harmless. I am small horses.

I AM SO GREAT

Cecily Iddings

That the tree that owns itself
is not itself might disappoint you
like it disappointed me.

Its predecessor toppled, sorry to say,
roots rotting, and then Junior Ladies
regrew it with an acorn and care.

Emily Dickinson is not so great,
my father tells me. Cecily,
take vitamins, and sleep enough. Yes,

Emily Dickinson is no John Donne,
John Donne is no William Shakespeare,
and who knows really who he was?

The Colonel who truly bore a great love
for the white oak had a great desire
that the oak be self-possessed,

and thus he willed it. One afternoon,
optimistically, Emily and a cousin
no one much remembers decided

to be distinguished. I lived by that tree.
Neither of us was very important,
but it was the more distinguished,

the road narrowing to a single lane
to give it reach. All the vehicles
slowed down, everyone that passed
passed with hesitation.

PHYSICS

Allison Titus

What I know about physics is after every exit, the velocity of reentry stutters. If by exit I mean leave-taking. Cask of gloves in the reservoir scuffed and unpaired. Such thin wrists below the cuff. Cask of whiskey bottles pulled from the hill of the nunnery after the flood. How suddenly a thing will unbury. O how we mine for artifacts the endless dusk. Question: What are the physics of nostalgia? a) The vacant motel room. You in your slip. b) Our first year in Russia, the keening of the owls. c) In the pocket of the boy's red nylon jacket, a dead bird.

Answer: I am through inventing twilights brimming with thrushes.

Answer: A vast bridge begs swift repair.

THE OPPOSITE OF AMPUTATION

As seen from above is a preface. This story goes, there was a lame calf
folded at the fence, redundant heft. Pinafores girl
in the barn. The farmer knew what must be done,
and did it then stood there, his shirtsleeve
worked at the cuff by the wind. Desperation resembles nothing
so much as a spent rifle. The same strokes for cock
and trigger reload; reload
as the minuet of tending *here the bandages,*
here the splint. One thousand ailing bedsides decorate the sorrows,
lowing, which is never the sound of hunger. Minus an obituary
it is hard to fathom death as plain as the way the refrigerator
holds a casserole. *Thank you, but no thank you I cannot keep anything*
down. The opposite of amputation, says the doctor, is graft.
A lean-to hooked on a droughting forest, as tentative
a shelter as skin. In unremarkable minutes the world passes
to habit. We watch the calf carted off, blood like a hem
wound black and wide past the throat.

SUM OF EVERY LOST SHIP, MINUS ITS APOLOGY

The sea has nothing to say about salt. The bird and its feathers;
the plum and its skin. Even the hairs in the horsehair comb quiver
unmechanic. Even the shore retreats.

I might as well say it: Behind every blue dress is an ocean.

For each water molecule a catastrophe of satin.

I was a pilgrim charged with fishing doll eyes
from the bottom of the sea. An impossible task

for which there must be some equation,

another way to say *Electrolyte is to cell*

as *rust* is to *blood*. What unit of measurement
besides fathom. Because the river forgets nothing.

Not tourniquets or letters, not gloves not cakes.

By the edge of slipping shore I lower the nets. I wait.

These days everything is easier to forgive.

DEAR SUNSET, DEAR AVALANCHE

Kazim Ali

dear sunset dear avalanche
dear thunder without lightning

dear window sound of last year
dear mountainous landscape unfolding

dear water in air unraveling
ice-filled clamor that fetches

I'm fetching, tolling, a libelous suit
sold and soldiering up the slopes

navigating the trails without adequate supplies
opening up the roof of the ride

a somnambulist, a compassless climber,
a lunchless hack, naked on the rock road

my ear cocked to the distance
dear solo slipping sun

this is the part the slow whispering interrupts
dear disappeared dear desperate

this is the part you're always interrupting,
the part you want to be buried under—

INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDIA RANKINE

Claudia Rankine was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1963. She is the author of four collections of poetry: *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, *PLOT*, *The End of the Alphabet*, and *Nothing in Nature Is Private*. With Lisa Sewell, she co-edited *American Poets in the 21st Century: The New Poetics*, forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press in 2007. She has taught at Barnard College, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and the University of Houston, and currently teaches at Pomona College. The first part of this interview was conducted by Jennifer Flescher in March 2006; the second part was conducted by Robert N. Casper in July 2006.

Where does the relationship of form and function begin for you?

Form has everything to do with content. We know this from Olson. I love the potential openness of the page—there is so much unspoken “underneath-ness” in language. I try to use the page to illustrate the mind’s meanderings—to suggest silence, for example, and to represent all the ways the subject is approached in my own mind. The more I can open up the page to accommodate my own explorations, the more integrity the poem has for me.

In some of my earlier books, I experimented with ways to keep the text open. I was invested, perhaps crudely, in communicating the fact that the poem is a process without resolution. In order for me to begin, I need to come up with a form that accommodates an investigative poetics. For instance, the introduction of images in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* was an attempt to acknowledge a total experience of being—to involve as many of our senses as possible.

All writing is a kind of performance, but modes that fabricate closure seem less authentic to me. When I was working on *The End of the Alphabet*, for example, which was in my mind about silence, about a darkness that felt crippling, the language had to be very different from the language in something like *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, which is interested in mediated responses, the media, and the clarity or lack of clarity around our own connectedness.

You've said that in Nothing in Nature Is Private the subject did not determine the form. I'm interested in revisiting that statement in light of Don't Let Me Be Lonely.

This is a surprise—I forgot about that first book!

Really—why?

Because I always see my second book as my first book. I think *Nothing in Nature Is Private* was an unconscious effort in a very conscious process. That book came out of an MFA program, where I behaved a bit like a tennis player—trying to hit poems over the net back to a roomful of people. There's that constant struggle between satisfying the expectations of the program and what your unconscious wants to investigate.

Did you have a sense of that struggle when you were writing the book?

No. I only thought of it when I received the book—I was mortified [laughter]. The box of books just sat in the corner of my room. *Nothing in Nature Is Private* was created from my interests—after all, I did write it!—yet it didn't feel like something I wanted to have written. When I began *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* I went back to the Césaire quote that begins *Nothing in Nature*—I felt I finally had the tools to address race and the space around what it means to be human, such as our responsibility to society.

I was excited to see you return to a more accessible, socially engaged voice with Don't Let Me Be Lonely, but I am still struck by the fragmented, interior register of your second and third books.

I feel I need both things. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* has an interior register as well: even though the book tries to negotiate questions in the world, it focuses on one's inability to effect change, which is deeply crippling. It's a journey inward that allows you to come back out. The earlier book's title, *Nothing in Nature Is Private*, correctly engaged my belief that the public and the private selves are intertwined. But ultimately those early poems seem too public—the issues seem set up. In writing *The End of the Alphabet* I tried to get closer to the private self and not be overwhelmed by the darkness and vulnerability that self seems to hold. Eventually I was able to bring that feeling back into its context, in terms of both the personal and public world.

I think if you always see yourself as in process, always searching, you're willing to try things out. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get to the real questions as I perceive them. I also get inspiration from so many different places, like Samuel Beckett's plays or Ben Marcus's experimental fiction or Lyn Hejinian's poetry or Cornell West's essays. There's a way West articulates our sense of responsibility that I want to somehow mimic. So the form, when it is really working, is open, responsive and flexible.

In PLOT there is a poem about pregnancy that looks like a pregnant belly, and even the names of the main characters are allegorical—such as Ersatz. How conscious were the creations of these representations, and where did they begin?

PLOT started with the idea that there are certain subjects you can't write about without being sentimental—the issue of sentimentality in poetry and the sacredness of certain subjects intrigues me. I hadn't yet had a

child, but I was thinking about motherhood in the abstract—thinking about it intellectually—and I was able to build a world before I sat down to write. Also, at the time I was watching all of Ingmar Bergman's films. The characters' names in *PLOT* came from the names of the actors in *Scenes from a Marriage*, Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson. I loved that Erland sounded like "her land" and that Liv dovetailed into *life, live, livelihood*. But Bergman's film *Wild Strawberries* probably influenced the plot of *PLOT* most. Because the book is fictional, I didn't want to use a real child's name. And because in many ways it ended up investigating the life of an artist, the child became a replacement for the art object—hence the idea of Ersatz, never a real child, as artistic construct.

In PLOT you work with lexical proximities, such as "clock" and "lock"—could you talk about that?

The idea with *PLOT* was pregnancy, so the thought was quite literally: how many things engender an other? How can the subject inform the form? Since *PLOT* was an investigation of shape within shape, and language was my tool—the words became lives themselves, and I began to see words within words.

I wrote *PLOT* a few years before I got pregnant—the anxieties were my anxieties in anticipation of having a child, the anxieties of every woman I had ever talked to about having a child. *To the Lighthouse* became an important source for the book. I couldn't have written *PLOT* when I had a child because I would have thought I had a specific arc for it. In the book the nine months start with the thought, "I don't want to visit anything from what I have lived onto this child," and move to the understanding that the child returns possibility to the parents' lives, opens up what is possible for both child and parents. If I had already had a child, I would've written a different book; the writing went toward this rather simple, but to me then unknown, truth.

Are you still working with proximities?

Now I look at it differently. I was just working on a piece about consumption and desire—I started thinking how proximity is relational. For example, if you “owe” to “own,” what is the relationship between those two things? Do you really own it if you still owe on it? Or when you finally own it, does it own you? Are *capitalism* and *American* synonymous? Can one keep them relational but not reflective?

What about art and ownership? PLOT certainly looks at what a mother and a writer has to give up, or what changes for the writer when she becomes a mother.

I just read this great book by C. D. Wright, *Cooling Time*. In it she talks about poetry and pregnancy—she says, You get what you give—or, you lose some and you gain some, but there is no going back. You think it is a struggle of one against the other, but it isn’t at all. The language in which we think about the relationship between motherhood and art making is inadequate. Unfortunately we enter into motherhood feeling like it is an oppositional struggle rather than focusing on the effort living fully takes. This is what C. D. reminds us.

How do you feel about the importance of addressing race in your poetry?

Well, race is always a part of existence. Everybody is a race, and each racial identity allows access to cultural legacies. Race is always active—the question is how American writers engage this activity as it functions in this country. In the case of white writers, often the sense of privilege allows for the assumption that their realities are “normal” (the word *normal* being an explosive one), that their choices are not choices—they are just living life. I am always happy to see white writers who are responsible—who take race and class into account. Writers like Juliana Spahr, Jena Osman, Mark

Nowak, Charles Bernstein, and Tony Hoagland really make you understand that lives are constructed and that language is part of the construct. We are either contributing to the fictions or retraining those fictions. As a black person, I am interested in keeping blackness a present and active part of the world because it is a present and active part of the world. As poets we keep the field reflective by acknowledging who we are in the world—by coming clean with that. This is all the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets were asking for: to understand that language is constructed around certain investments, certain sets of privileges. If you read Juliana Spahr's work, it is clear she is conscious of being a white woman in America. As a reader, you know she is aggressively thinking about what this allows her. She makes statements from her perspective and her understanding of what it means to be her. I think that is the most honest place a writer can begin from, and I admire how her work acknowledges its beginnings.

In my own work, it's not that I feel I need to say every ten minutes that I am a black woman who lives in America—but I am a black woman who lives in America. It makes a difference, but not necessarily in the scripted ways one might think. When it seems to be in play, I put it in play. The perception that race is not an active part of our existence allows people to make the kind of mistakes they make against each other. This kind of responsibility starts on the level of recognition and accountability to the self. In other words, what does it mean to be the speaker of the piece you are working on—that is crucial to the integrity of the piece. It's not anything big and grand—simply *I am here; here has a history*.

What about your identification as a woman writer?

A female consciousness is not one that I can separate out. If the content allows for a full being of the self, then the full being of the self means that it is going to be a female, black self. Those things are always going to be integrated into the consciousness of my speaker. Even if I constructed a

white male speaker, the fact that I am doing the constructing means these issues of race and gender, directly and indirectly, will be in play.

Let's talk about a subject that came up earlier: going to an MFA program, and how that affected your first book. How does that relate to your own teaching?

I don't want to suggest that I wasn't guided well at Columbia. I was very lucky to have J. D. McClatchy as my thesis advisor, and I worked with some really great people, like Alfred Corn, Henri Cole, and Dan Halpern—smart, insightful people. The danger with MFA programs is they create a sort of factory: at the end of day seven or year three, you're going to complete something. So you strive toward that completion, and you're not encouraged toward messiness. In my own teaching I try to create environments where exploration is more important than ultimate product. At a certain point people will sit down and have a manuscript, but they don't need to do that in front of me. I get excited by the imaginative possibilities students create, which lead to more possibilities.

For poetry, I think privileging exploration—and the formal innovation that follows—is distinctly American. We've had it since Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman . . .

. . . and Gertrude Stein.

Right, and William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens. It's what's exciting to me about American poetry!

My dream MFA program would have a philosopher, an eco-poetics person, and a political analyst on staff with the poets. It's about what the mind can hold, and interrogating the mind. I've been working with the poet David Ray Vance on a documentary poetics reader, which will come out with Wesleyan University Press. It's very exciting to come up with a definition

for the term—the definition we are working with involves being interested in the situation of our existence through actual documents. We are using Muriel Rukeyser's definition as a base—she wrote about extending the document into the world of the poem. Her work in *The Book of the Dead* is one model for this. These kinds of conversations would allow the field of the poem to be open to all the ways we are domestically and globally intertwined. It doesn't have to be overtly political, as we see in the work of Susan Howe and Anne Carson.

But a document that is somehow outside of poetry—the poetry becomes a response to that?

Right, or in conversation with it—the response sets up a dialogue. For instance, in *Shut Up Shut Down* Mark Nowak pulls documents in to create a field that actually more accurately portrays what the whole story looks like.

So the context or the dialogue creates a larger sense of truth.

Yes, exactly. C. D. Wright's work often allows you to step inside a territory, and see that place in a larger way. It privileges the voice of the inhabitants—I'm committed to anything that brings the individual back into the room/stanza. Not in a narrative way, but in a way that shows that the entire environment is dependent—the individual, and the river, and the oil field, and the factory are all somehow in some kind of conversation.

How do you feel about accessibility in poetry?

Not everything you pick up is going to be accessible to you immediately. The kind of reading we do—the kind of reading the nonspecialized person does—reading the newspaper, reading magazines, reading whatever is around—is very narrative-oriented. Consequently, the expectation is all

genres will continue in that vein. I think you learn to read a poet like John Ashbery. The more of his poetry you read, the more your expectations shift. The sentences often meander the way a mind might, the pronouns shift and ask us to have looser expectations from what a more linear narrative asks from us. In the end it all makes this wonderful sense, but you have to be open to the track it takes.

When I wrote *The End of the Alphabet* I was having this conversation with myself about confessional poetry—what it is and what it is not. I didn't want to get to the expression of a feeling through the investigation of actual events in my own life. I had had one of those harrowing childhoods where the events could parade as false and distracting subject matter. I was reading around a lot in contemporary poetry at that time, trying to find ways to avoid being distracted by the factual events of my own life. Many contemporary poems told an anecdote or described a scene, based in life events, biographical or imagined, in order to express some feeling—I am very angry, I am very sad, I am very depressed. I thought, Couldn't you just write the poem from the moment of expression rather than having to lead the reader there through events? When you think about the work of Hopkins, Vallejo, Dickinson, Celan, or Glück, you find yourself experiencing an authentic rush of feeling. What makes you understand and identify with those poets is that you have had that feeling—you are in the emotion, not the life.

I started to try to write poems that began in the moment of a feeling—it felt as if I rewrote the same poem a thousand times. *The End of the Alphabet* was a very metaphor-driven book—this feels like this, and this feels like this—and as long as I could keep coming up with another analogy, I could keep writing the poem. The process I was involved in ultimately boiled down to the question: how close can I make language represent without being representational? By the same token, I'm always shocked when people say they don't understand my work—my intention is always a kind of clarity.

The End of the Alphabet centers on a miscarriage that has already happened—it seems to search for reconciliation out of the psychic pain that remains.

I recognize pain in the faces of so many people, and in the work of so many people. For me it's not about reconciliation so much as recognition—I don't feel you can reconcile such events. I've felt touched by work that addresses pain—it's almost a texture. In writing about pain I've felt I'm opening out something I could never reconcile—a kind of conversation I knew I couldn't end, but could begin. I'm interested in moments that hold the confusion of our pain—the worry and the fear—and yet show how we continue on. That's why I'm fascinated with Beckett's plays: he can tick-tock his way through the difficulty of pain and remain in it. Because pain also seems to remain difficult, I feel it's a narrative lie to create a structure that closes it off, resolves it.

Right—maybe reconciliation was not the best word.

Accommodation is a term I like, and engagement.

The End of the Alphabet and PLOT both instruct the reader how to comprehend the conflict of the book, while Don't Let Me Be Lonely relies on the bald power of its character's declarations.

The End of the Alphabet and PLOT, in exploring psychic trauma, keep stepping into the same muck over and over and over again, despite their interrogative nature. The point is that the psyche refuses movement. Lonely moves across and through time.

Do you think of Don't Let Me Be Lonely primarily as a lyric essay—as something that was moving away from “poetry”?

That's a hard question for me because of my identification as a poet, and because of the way poets like Anne Carson, Mark Nowak, Kenneth Goldsmith, or Tracie Morris have expanded the notion of what a poem is. I didn't start the book thinking, "Oh, I'm going to try to do a lyric essay"—I thought for a long time about what form would allow me the most flexibility to bring in as many things as possible. I saw the book as a kind of assemblage, so I knew it had to be informational. In writing drafts I began to think of it as a lyric essay—then I went back and read essayists like Renata Adler and Joan Didion, and turned to contemporary artists like William Kentridge. I'm always looking for help—always thinking, "Who can show me a way to do this?"

There are a number of poets who employ other mediums to augment or enlarge our sense of what poetry is.

Theresa Hak Jyung Cha's *Dictee* is a good model because of its freedoms, its willingness to go wherever it needs to go in order to document the kind of strife present in the creation of her Korean American identity.

Itself a hybrid identity.

Right, exactly. It's funny: I didn't think about *Dictee* when I was writing *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*—I didn't go in thinking about utilizing images. I wrote the piece about James Byrd because of what President Bush said about the case: he wasn't clear on what had happened to the men who killed Byrd. To Bush's credit, he was saying they had been dealt with harshly and that's what mattered, but I kept thinking about how Byrd got lost in that gesture of closure—I wanted to bring him back visually because comments like that erase him. That's how it began. At first I thought I would only bring back people who needed to be brought back in images—in most cases it ended up being black men, like Abner Louima. But then I realized other parts of the project could be served by a conversation set up through the text's relation to the image.

The book's section breakers contain a static-filled TV, which makes us more aware of both our position as viewers and our often naïve belief in media as truth.

What I like about the section breakers is the fact that they themselves are a critique of a cultural passivity—watching television has become a national American pastime, and that's where we get our rest. So, in the breaks between the sections you hang out [laughter]. Did you know there were images of George Bush in those televisions?

Really?

You can't really see that it's him, but if you squint you can see a male figure in the static. While I was working on the book, my husband—the photographer John Lucas—said, "Why don't you put an image of George Bush here?" Initially I said no because I wanted to show that America is much larger than an individual. That's how we arrived at the static.

As a way to obscure Bush, yet make him ominously present. I thought he showed up in more images.

Oh, yes, he's in there with Colin Powell, in a cartoon which circulated on the Internet. I think our culture tends to get distracted by individuals; the real issues need too much thought. In the case of Hurricane Katrina we would rather talk about where Condi Rice was shopping while people were stranded than the real issue of poverty and race in this country.

On the subject of truth and authority, I want to talk about the relationship between the text and the notes in Don't Let Me Be Lonely. It almost seems as if the narrative voice in the notes is separate from the rest of the book and has a greater claim to truth—but a suspect truth, a just-beyond-the-fingertips truth.

After I finished working on the text, I felt it was necessary to provide actual facts. I didn't feel committed to the literal truth, but to creating a mosaic that created a larger truth. However, because the events represented had their own facts in real life, I felt some distinction had to be made. I asked a graduate student assistant of mine—John Woods, a fantastic fiction writer—to research the facts on all the events in the book. He wrote descriptions for the notes, and I took what I needed and changed what I had to, but never in an artistic sense—more in the sense of providing the “truth.” Even though sometimes the notes tell their own stories, everything in them is based on fact, whatever that means.

At one point the narrator says, “I tried to fit language into the shape of usefulness”—but the structure of the book felt like it complicated such an attempt. One would normally call the notes section of a book useful, but in Don't Let Me Be Lonely it interestingly intruded on, or competed with, the book itself.

I was surprised at that. I think people have used the notes as a way not to read the text, to be distracted from the text. That's unfortunate—I really wanted them to function like the images: to take away the “literal truth” authority from the text. It's important that people don't think I had a sister whose husband and children died in a car crash, for instance. I wanted the notes to destabilize the text further—they make the book messier, and I like that. I'm not interested in creating anything that contributes to the fiction of wholeness; instead, I continue to try to find a mode that can accommodate without pretending to transcend, that manages to stay in the mess and continue an exploration of thought in the imagination.

Let's talk more about your current project.

I'm working with my husband on a film essay, influenced by the work of Chris Marker. Films like *Le Jete* and *Sans Soleil* provided me a starting

point in terms of collaging. We are looking at engaging consumerism—desire, ownership and landscape. What does desire look like in the landscape of the mall, the superstore, Madison Avenue? Right now we have shot lists, and I'm working on the screenplay. But then things come up that take me away from it. Things like Katrina. Things that feel like they need a response.

Which you don't feel that the film can incorporate?

That's the thing: I don't know. Lately I've been working on a video essay about Zinedine Zidane's head-butt of Marco Materazzi in this year's World Cup final. Before the incident happened, videos show the two talking—for viewers, this moment is silent. What's being exchanged at the moment? Maybe it doesn't have anything to do with race or national identity, but maybe it does. Then the explosion happens, and the general response is Zidane is a bad man and should apologize . . .

But the public doesn't know what Materazzi said to Zidane . . .

The public might never know—and it might not be what we think, that's the other thing. But in a way it doesn't matter what we think, and it doesn't matter what was said. Because there's the other story that has to do with Zidane's national identity versus his ethnic identity. I'm compelled by this story, not just because of the mystery of it but also because of the familiarity of it. As a black person in the United States, I'm fascinated by that moment—it reminds me of the moment when Frederick Douglass decides to fight his master. A moment when consequences are irrelevant. With Zidane, video has captured the moment, and we can play it and replay it without ever really knowing more than what we see. Clearly his physical response is the one we're saying is not acceptable. But something else that happened in that moment was as violent to him as his head-butting, and it's brought forward through language. In *The End of the*

Alphabet and *PLOT* the psyche holds a trauma that seems a greater violence than anything the physical body can hold. I am held by those moments.

At one point in PLOT, the narrative voice says, "A certain type of life is plot-driven, a certain slant in life." That made me think of Emily Dickinson's line, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant," and how our cultural narrative of pregnancy and childbirth is so cleaned up, so picture-perfect.

That's why I love the word *plot*—the various meanings of it. And having it be both so flexible and yet so rigid, and also being an end point in terms of a grave.

It's also a little insidious—to plot against, for instance.

Yes, exactly. It's a word that allows you to live and die in it . . .

And not entirely trust it, even though the whole point of our culture is to believe in narrative. If it was named narrative, it would be something else, but as plot it keeps us on our toes.

It has its own subversive elements written inside of it.

Exactly. I think that's a good place to stop for now.

BACKED UP IN THE SOUL

(COLLECTED FROM CNN)

Hours later, still in the difficulty of what it is to be, just like that, just the way Stevens said, inside it, standing there, maybe wading, maybe waving, standing where the deep waters of everything backed up, one said,

climbing over bodies, one said, stranded on a roof, one said, trapped in the building, and in the difficulty, nobody coming and still someone saying, who could see it coming, the difficulty of that.

The fiction of the facts assumes innocence, ignorance, lack of intention, misdirection; the necessary conditions of a certain time and place.

Have you seen their faces?

Faith, not fear, she said. She'd heard that once and was trying to stamp the phrase on her mind. At the time, she couldn't speak it aloud. He wouldn't tolerate it. He was angry. Where were they? Where was anyone? This is a goddamn emergency, he said.

Then someone else said it was the classic binary between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots, between the whites and the blacks in the difficulty of all that.

Then each house was a mumbling structure, all that water, buildings peeling apart, the yellow foam, the contaminated stench of mildew, mold.

The missing limbs, he said, the bodies lodged in piles of rubble, dangling from rafters, lying face down, arms outstretched on parlor floors.

And someone said, where were the buses? And simultaneously someone else said, FEMA said it wasn't safe to be there.

What I'm hearing, she said, which is sort of scary, is they all want to stay in Texas.

He gave me the flashlight, she said, but I didn't want to turn it on. It was all black. I didn't want to shine a light on that.

We never reached out to anyone to tell our story, because there's no ending to our story, he said. Being honest with you, in my opinion, they forgot about us.

It's awful, she said, to go back home to find your own dead child. It's really sad.

And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, she said, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them.

You simply get chills every time you see these poor individuals, so many of these people almost all of them that we see, are so poor, someone else said, and they are so black.

Have you seen their faces?

Then this aestheticized distancing from Oh my god, from not believable, from dehydration, from over-heating, from no electricity, no power, no way to communicate

We are drowning here

Still in the difficulty

As if the faces in the images hold all the consequences

And the fiction of the facts assumes randomness and indeterminacy.

He said, I don't know what the water wanted.
(It wanted to show you no one would come.)

He said, I don't know what the water wanted.
(As if then and now were not the same moment.)

He said, I don't know what the water wanted.

Call out to them.
I don't see them.
Call out anyway.

Did you see their faces?

from THE DOTTERY

Kirsten Kaschock

You aren't mammarian. Can't have. What a dotter needs is the thin gruel you've vanquished from your good-for-nothings. We don't care how small you've grown. How raked the stage when you were a white factory. How you rolled from room to room as on a cart. What tubes. A dotter needs full blows. What are you thinking—trusting in chemistry? The molecules will seer her from the inside, like glass. You must do what's natural, though pain sends you to dice her against a wall. Pain is natural. Pain is good. Good is natural. Voilà. We knew the proof. We knew we knew it. Just as we know if you won't flooze, get blousy, well then, you've ruined her. Them all. That's why we mustn't let you get your hands on one. They aren't natural, your hands. They taste gray, like latex, even from a distance. Hoofish. Mannish. Mannequine. Not animal enough.

Gratitude tugs earth by root or by string. Otherwise, she'd eddy off in a sick bitter twist of light. She senses her blessings. Her blessings, they hold her down to it. Good orderlies. She senses them and they are sensational, her blessings. One is tall, one smells of sweat and sour chocolate. Blessings are not dotters. Some blessings have other things going. A robot arm. A bridge over the rubies. A matching bag or box. She takes tinder into the flooding gardens to rid herself. Of all her thoughts the worst is black-eyed susan. Dark and pretty. And not easy to kill, not by amnesia, not by riot fire.

BY INFINITY

Rae Gouirand

If the horizon—if the line—
pulls at the eye—pulls a thread

between presence and absence—
is a suture—is a particular resistance—

makes a net of thought—names
a before and after—pulls harder

at what's closed—until there is
a way to leave this—to enter

the coast—to dim the mirror—
to pretend another place for

the wrong bones—for grammar
in stutter—for a dot whose want

to join the line is felt at point—
is every line—is felt in every net—

in every absent trapping—in every
furthest point that reaches every

further point—the verge that holds
its own and knows the distance—

invites the open limit as washing
the face on waking—from brow

to chin—a fold now for the eyes
to close again on the brief shine—

TEN SECOND WINDOWS

Light as incandescent & loyal.
Loyal as a kind of submission.

Submission as a final saying.
A final line to mark a count.

The line from here thus departs.
Shadow as blame, a fine, a guess.

The line the line. It radiates
its own idea of bareness.

A script. The line here wrong
& final. A business.

Light as incandescent & loyal.
A high dormer over a sleeper.

A far windmill stealing breath
again. Moth from lung, hand

from chest. Song offered to no
address. A pin in wind tracing less.

THE OBJECT OF THE OBJECT

Nance Van Winckel

: to bound, or be
boundless. To be full
of itself, no longer

substitute for what
the eye prefers
to eat. To be meadow

at one end of the world,
money at the other,
unbitten by the body

between. To be
empty, an O
for zero, always

the portal, never
a port. Hiccup,
not horizon. No

figment of, no
sty in the eye
at the end of a page.

SONNET

Karen Volkman

Laughing below, the unimagined room
in unimagined mouths, a turning mood
speaking itself the way a fulling should
overspilling into something's dome,

some moment's edging over into bloom.
What is a happening but conscious cloud
seeking its edge in wound or word
pellucidity describing term

as boundary, body, violated bourn
no sounding center, circumscription turn.
Mother of mirrors, angel of the acts,

do all the sighing breathing clicking wilds
summon the same blue breadth the sense subtracts,
the star suborning in its ruptured fields.

SONNET

Nice knuckle, uncle. Nice hat, hornet.
Nice is nervouser than eye or at,
the gone get going, the icons eat
a lawful loin, an iridescent sweet

glows its grid-iris, the noun forget.
Plier! keep folding, administer the that,
perennials languished in a pliant heat
stay go come stay, white nunca, red meat—

green is the color of time or green is gram
or green as mold is the house of oblivion
and green how I want you green, that house of am

loves its numberables, the lamping sham—
quick candle, click the trigger in the tun,
red now, green when, that shocks the shaking sun.

SALAD

Caroline Knox

1.

Line a new shoe box with oiled waxed paper. Make up a batch of cranberry-banana Jell-O and chill; allow it to begin to jell. Finely grate a small head of red cabbage; fold it together with half a pound of currants and half a pound of shredded coconut into the jelling mixture. Carefully pour the mixture into the lined shoebox and allow to jell firmly.

2.

In another bowl, make up a batch of lime Jell-O and chill; allow it to begin to jell. Shred six carrots and add them; add a cup of drained mandarin oranges and a quarter of a cup of finely chopped chives. Carefully pour the mixture over the #1 layer without disturbing it.

3.

In a third bowl, make up a batch of orange Jell-O and chill; allow it to begin to jell. Peel and chop four apples, six sticks celery; chop half a cup of walnuts. Add these to the mixture, along with a package of rainbow baby marshmallows. Carefully pour the mixture over the #2 layer without disturbing it.

4.

In a fourth bowl, make up a batch of strawberry Jell-O and chill; allow it to begin to jell. Chop finely a half pound each of dried dates and dried figs. Together with a cup of slivered almonds, add the dates and figs to the red mixture. Carefully pour the mixture over the #3 layer without disturbing it.

5.

In a fifth bowl, make up a batch of lemon Jell-O and chill; allow it to begin to jell. Add a half pint of cottage cheese, half a jar of Major Grey's chutney, a package of alfalfa sprouts, and a package of Bacos. Carefully pour the mixture over the #4 layer without disturbing it.

6.

In a sixth bowl, make up a batch of cherry Jell-O; allow it to begin to jell. Add a can of drained garbanzo beans, a can of drained kidney beans, and a quarter of a cup of crumbled feta cheese. Carefully pour the mixture over the #5 layer without disturbing it. Finally, the shoebox should be full.

7.

Allow the salad to jell overnight in the icebox. Just before serving time, invert the box onto a platter and peel off the waxed paper. Mask the salad with Cool Whip into which six tablespoons of Cointreau have been folded. Dust the top of the Cool Whip with cinnamon and nutmeg. Slice and serve.

A DRESS BOOK

ROSEMARY
CHICKEN

MINEOLA

TANGERINE

ALEXIS
NEXUS

BERMUDA
SCHWARTZ

JULIE ANN
FRIES

8 JULIE ANN
CARROTS

8 JULIANNE
VEGETABLES

KAY

CEDILLA

TAWNY
PORT

GEORGIA PEACHES

SANDY

SHORES

ROSE

QUARTZ

HONEY

GRAHAM

OLIVE

TEPANADE

JANUARY 27

Erica Kaufman

tonite i leave my work
at work late. because
i want to post "winter love."
see it in front. acknowledge
her public. perfect. repeat.
like my favorite word.
"envelop." like last nite.
the way peripheral brings
lips. and the bus never
comes quick enough.
to take me to the church.
where we feign casual.
feign interest. i love
pink. coloring books.
earlobes. tomorrow
i'll have class.

FEBRUARY 8

tonite write another
assignment about jeans.
think about all the things
i want to consume. make
a list of side effects. of
directions when you ask
my torso to move. want
two more pillows. tiger
balm. my own thermos.
mallard after mallard.
and certain objects
transparent. like what
if i just lay down
in a museum. in search
of lost transitions.
tangible. like shorthand.
like with anything
the want to be extreme.
to be comfortable with
the word sovereign.

LOVE POEM

sometimes her eye
follows me. and I want
to be re-taught the verb
"to be." all dreams of
magnetic surfaces and
prepositional speech.
this postmodern sense
of vulnerability. basic
binary code language.
take me. all receptor
and consequence.
the process of becoming
physical like I take
pictures for a reason.

ONE DAY I WAS WATCHING THE BIRDS

Alessandra Lynch

The spit-polish grackles and the blackbirds with their bright razors
tucked in each wing, and the purple finch
disoriented, absent-minded,
a nuthatch-tuft nosing above the crammed yard—whirling dazedly,
near-sated, in full arcs around
the thin, pecked perch—the house wrens
gobbling seed, the slivered, empty shells rising
to hills of spackled dust.

They got fatter and fatter and more indiscriminate, drinking
water from the banged-out garbage lid, beaking
the house and its rusted gutter for loose shingle-grit—
chittering, vomiting husk.
Crows became suet-begotten bags on wings.
Bloat-plumaged sparrows lost their litheness. Lusterless sleeks
pumping
dully in circles. What miracle or horror propelled them to veer back?

Their small bird-bellies aching as though empty
even after they'd had their fill, even after
their wings rammed
brutally into one another
until their little green tower of seeds cracked, fell, hemorrhaging
my heart of squirrel, flooding out my eye of rabbit.

UNDER TONGUE

Anna Moschovakis

(after Ritsos)

You made a trip with your hands
a beaker, animus
came the poem



Paralyze me, heroize me, and other stuff
what do you think—we'll re-
remember how tired they get the dead



Fleet-footed dance of the reeds
with the smallest fish angel
small dactyl



Criminal art of apples
only for apples will you come
find me



White murder
yellow murder
murder: poem



The yellow beach brown, Tuesday morning
the round beach grass, almost evening
think you of little czars



House, go with god. Shutters shut
cycles—age—amplified on the bed
appeasement of your sleeping form



Dear petrified home: your thousand flocks
+ your thousand pawns, and all the salt
water you can bring argue me

STRIKE AND DIP

Gabriella Klein

You can take the girl out of the earthquake
but you can't take the earthquake out of the
 etcetera, still feeling tremors
between my ribs and after shock after

after shock. These are the faults
of saints. Remember New Madrid
 rang church bells in Boston.
The Missouri gathered solid as a building

then dominoed and flowed backwards. The current
retrograde, the thalweg receding. Fish were left to scale
on the shaven banks. The bells crashed into their bells.

Why do ice storms remind me of infidelity
and snow storms of reconciliation?

Let's take a disaster and blame it.
Harbor wave. Hissing wave. Let's be dramatic
 and not made of words. Fire,
fire, the fierceness through the throat.

COFFIN BONE

I was the loom
inside a horse, the engine
that drives thrashing
on great slabs of neck and anger at god

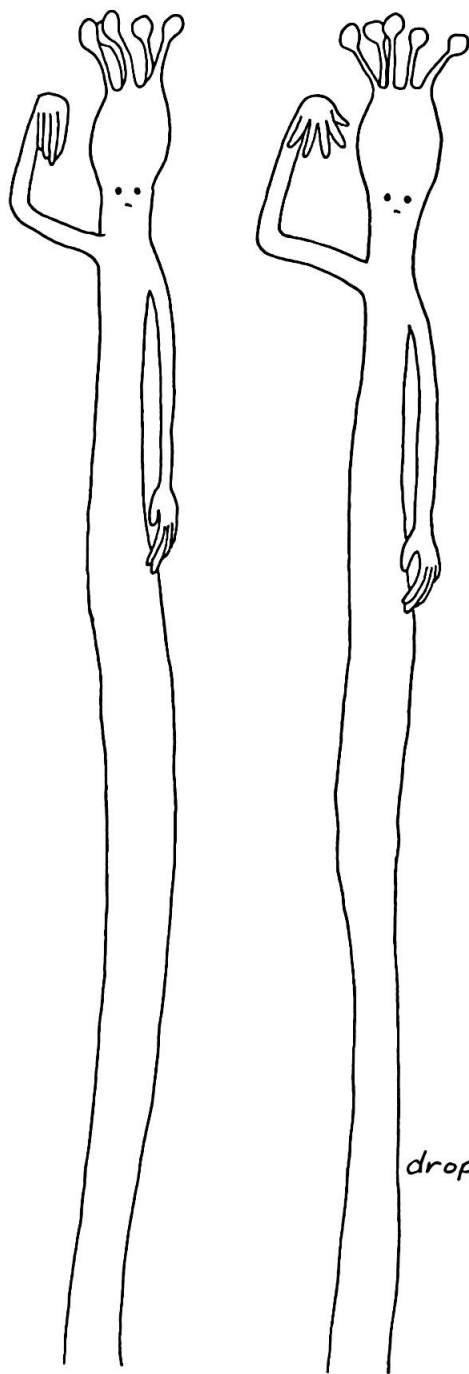
is not god. The Appaloosa is refusing to cross thresholds,
neither in nor out as dementia is
a dethroned king. And Comes Trouble

gives up in the field. Why,
I confess to his peaceful.
His triangulated head flat to grass. If the mud elongates

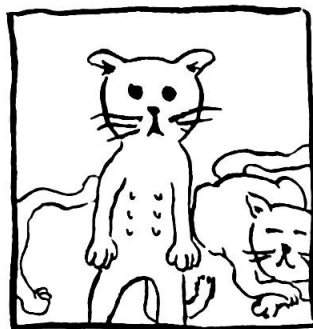
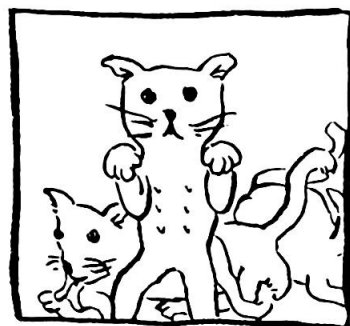
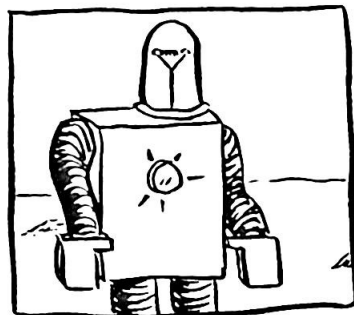
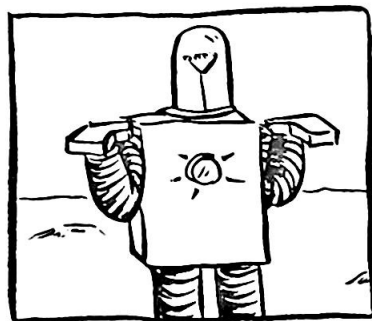
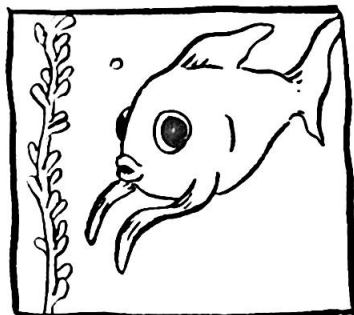
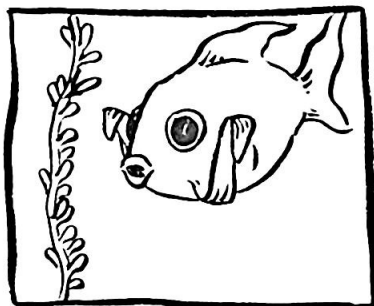
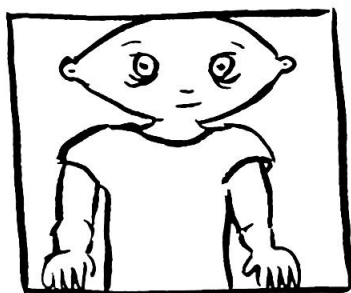
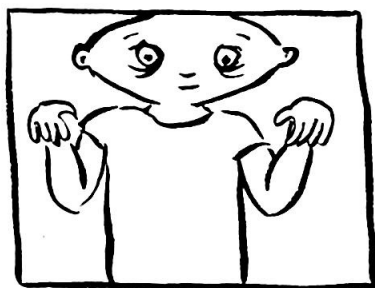
the tendon, the coffin bone
will stride through the hoof. A constellation

traverses the horseshoe meadow and love
between me
and god is not god. The insects

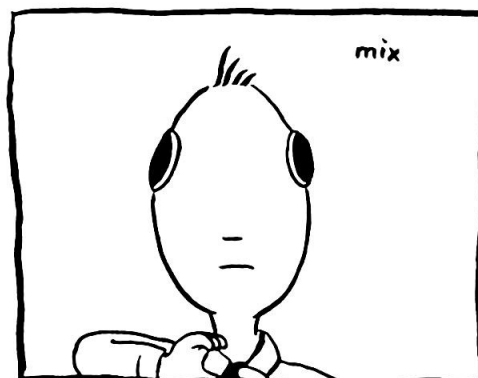
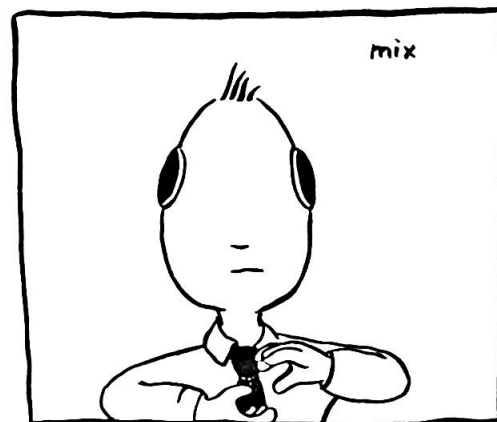
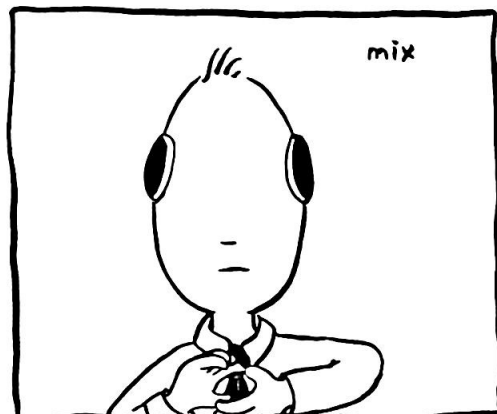
are a cacophony
of amity. We'll rope you to a tractor and pull.

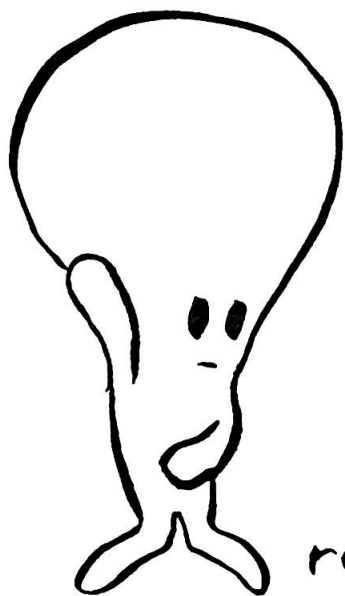


drop

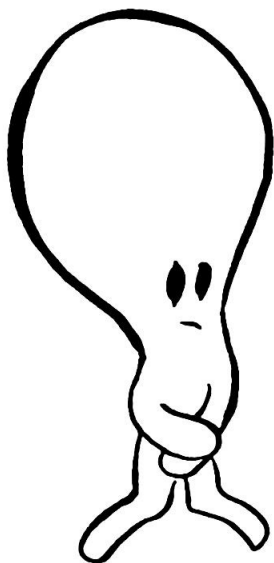


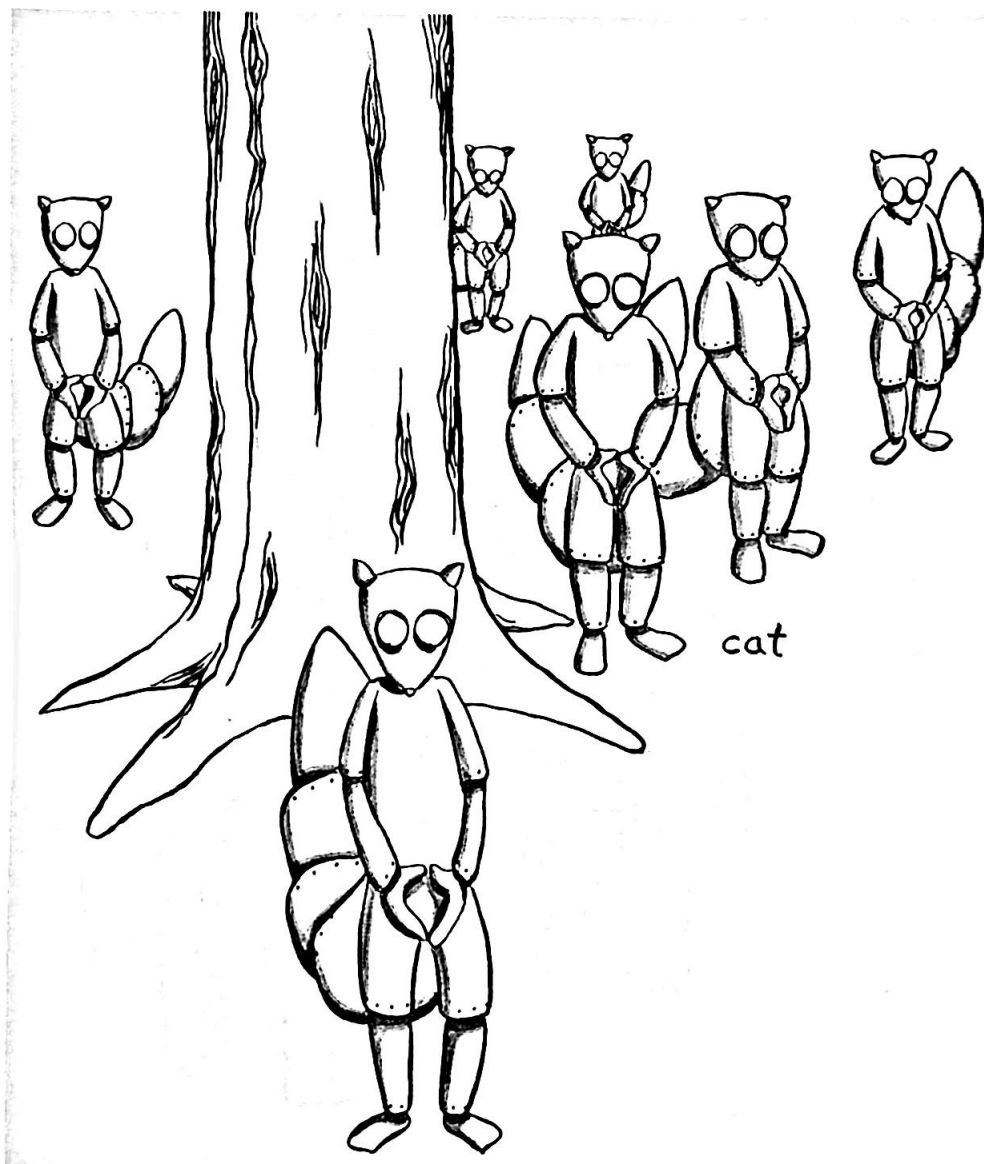
fall

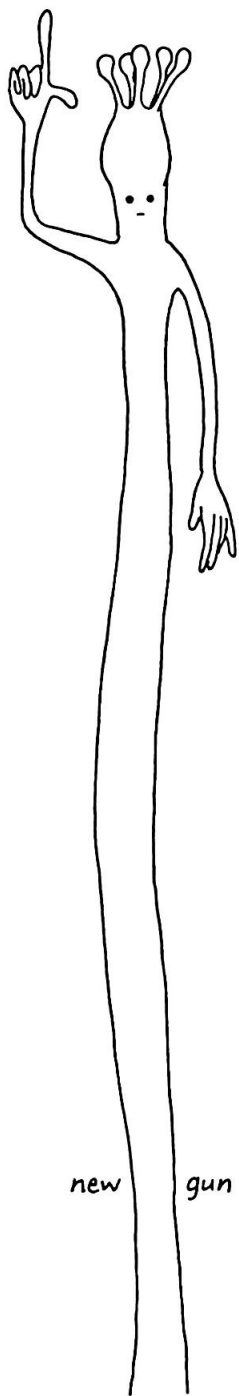




red

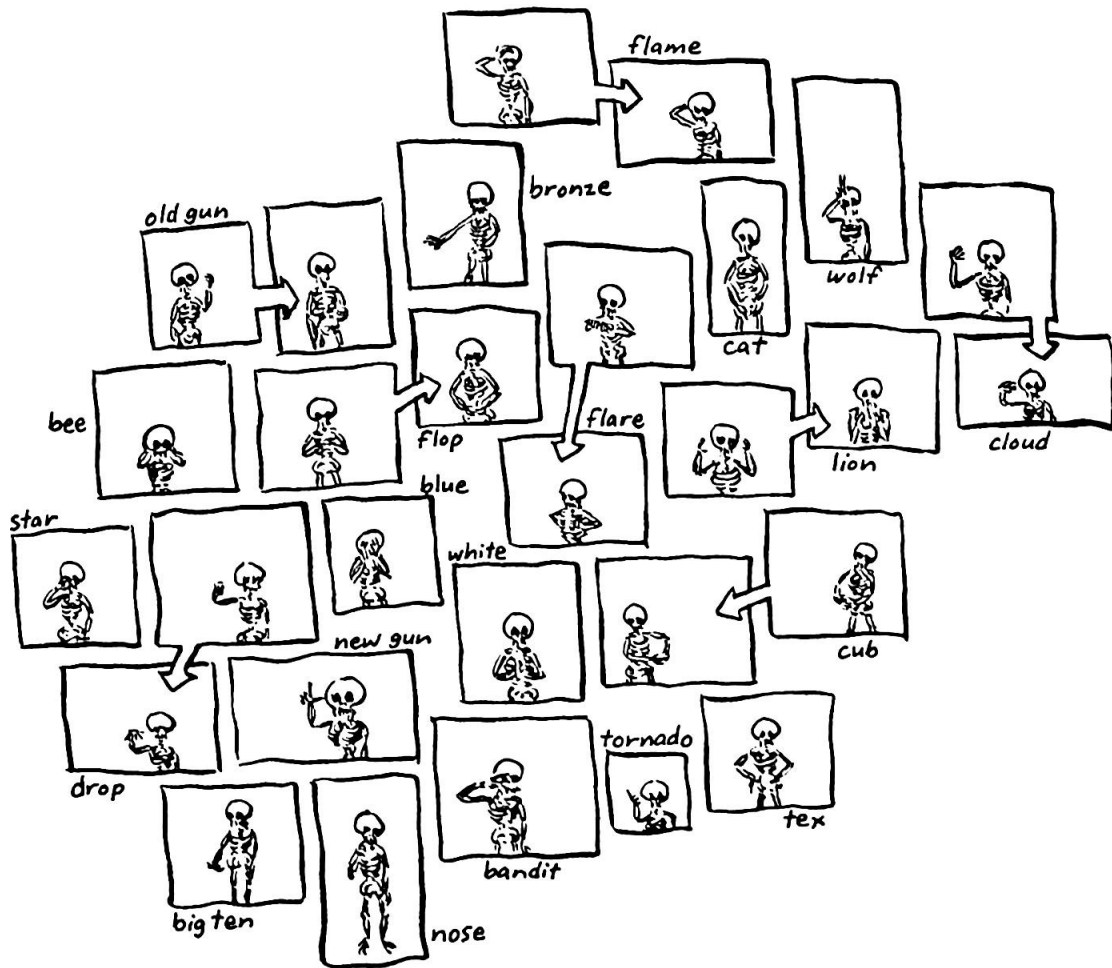






new

gun



DRAWING IN THE READER: LOOKING AT BOOKS IN THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF STEVIE SMITH

William May

The work of the British poet and novelist Stevie Smith (1902–1971) has often eluded critical exegesis or readerly interpretation. Appropriately, the illustrations that accompany her poems are both intransigent and inscrutable. Women with enigmatic expressions and ill-fitting hats gaze up to the puzzled reader. Sometimes they look right through us, their half-smiles testimony to a perspective just off the page, a line of vision we cannot see. They fight shy of matching the poem they have been called on to illustrate. More often than not they seem to be reading the poem rather than accompanying it. But perhaps they are reading us? Either way, they make stubborn wardens (if unnervingly good ones). But if Smith sees the visual and textual as inherently combative rather than dialogic, how might her drawings depict the printed books and texts they seem to undermine?



In an archive of unpublished drawings at the University of Tulsa,¹ Smith's doodled figures make further assaults on our attempts to tether down her texts to stable meanings. In the above illustration, sketched on the back of a party invitation, Smith recreates Henry Wallis's *The Death of Chatterton* (1856), tacitly acknowledging her source painting by the blank canvases hanging on the wall. In fact, the drawing presents us with a number of competing frames; although the book is apparently center stage, the capriciously angled window and the crooked pictures suggest that the visual can be a way of destabilizing the textual. The androgynous reader figure buries itself in its book, the coffinlike support of the bed only heightening the literality of the endeavor. However, the attempt at an act of private reading seems visually undone; the unseen spaces beyond the picture frames and billowing curtains suggest the diversions both of looking and being watched. Books in Smith's world then are both central and decentered; the very existence of a marginal illustration depicting the book undermines the orthodoxy of the printed text it is supposed to reinforce.

Stevie Smith's poem "What is she writing? Perhaps it will be good" thematizes this very uncertainty about the nature of her written texts by visually imagining their reception at the very point of their composition.

What is she writing? Perhaps it will be good,
The young girl laughs: 'I am in love.'
But the older girl is serious: 'Not now, perhaps later.'
Still the young girl teases: 'What's the matter?
To lose everything! A waste of time!'
But now the older one is quite silent,
Writing, writing, and perhaps it will be good.
Really neither girl is a fool.²



The writing girl in the picture seems to offer the reader a rare sighting of the ever elusive author. Yet, compared to the other two figures in the drawing, she is sketchily portrayed. Her short hair creates an androgynous aspect to her appearance, and the pointed dome of her head together with the bunching-up of her eyes toward the bottom of her face suggests a form more fetal than female. Her clothing, too, could suggest a baby's suit or, with the jagged line running down her left shoulder, the sacking cloth of a prisoner. This fetal-felon figure, child, prisoner, and author, is extremely diffuse—like the text she is writing, the author here is in a gradual process of becoming, her form and character ever ready to metamorphose to fulfill a different role of the author.

This ambiguous function is emphasized by the young girl who looks over the writer's shoulder, the reader-viewer of the picture. Her two arms, one outstretched to the writer's shoulder and the other to the writing desk, suggest a number a possibilities; are they playfully distracting the writer from her craft, perverting the authenticity of the writer's text through their guiding influence, or fixing the writer in place, thereby allowing her act of composition to take place?

Tellingly, the uneasy collaboration between writer and reader in the picture offers us no completed poem. Instead, the blank desk on which the writer composes her text acts as a frame for an absent center. Smith draws our attention away from the origin to the formulation of the thing that covers it. She not only highlights the false source of the original text but also, in so doing, reveals the minute trace of the author, replacing her sketch of an author that has never really existed. The illusion of the author and her fetishized book as a nodal point for interpretation, for centering a nexus of meaning, is simultaneously drawn out and drawn over in this imaging process. What is constructed was, by necessity, never organically there. And yet, through the interference between the visual and the textual, something *has* begun from this absence at the center of our picture; it is an absence that makes its presence felt elsewhere in the final, triumphant existence of the text which accompanies it. Can the figure of the onlooking cat unlock the mystery of the missing book at the center of the picture?

In the introduction to her book *Cats in Colour* (1959), Smith articulates the connection between this feline spectator and the writer in explicit terms—

How nice then to turn to the indifferent cat who can be made to mean so many things—and think them—being as it were a blank page on which to scrawl the hieroglyphics of our own grievance, bad temper and unhappiness, and scrawl, also, of course, the desired responses to these uncomfortable feelings.³

What the cat permits is a “reading reading”; not only an “indifferent” page which allows the writer infinite creative possibilities and the reader infinite interpretative ones but a chance to inscribe the “desired responses” back onto the page itself. The cat allows multiple readings and then reaffirms them. The imperceptible shift in this quoted passage between visual

symbols, hieroglyphics, and writing itself again recreates the reader-writer relationship as a visual imaging process. The cat we see in the picture seems to be both an onlooking warden for the struggling writer figure and itself another blank page, a space on which the writer can define her own position and maneuver within her own self-defined parameters, a *tabula rasa* for multiple substantiations of the author. The cat, too, is a territorial creature, guarding the reader's access to the text and staking out the boundaries of the writer's art. Smith's illustration shifts the attention away from the book itself and, in its absence, highlights our own process of reading it.

In Smith's poem "Fuite d'Enfance," the female speaker is once more the subject of surveillance:

I have two loves,
There are two loves of mine,
One is my father
And one my Divine.
My father stands on my right hand,
He has an abstracted look.
Over my left shoulder
My Divine reads me like a book.
Which shall I follow . . .
And following die?
No longer count on me
But to say goodbye

Yet in this poem, originally published in *Tender Only to One* (1938), the act of looking is far from straightforward. The father's "abstracted" look is both a description of his appearance and the manner of his looking, an ambiguity compounded by the accompanying illustration, where the two sexually malevolent onlookers are sketchily drawn.⁴ The female figure, wearing

what resembles both a hat and a halo, recalls both *Alice in Wonderland* and the playful overlooking reader from "What is she writing? Perhaps



it will be good," her expression impossible to decode as she hovers in the midst of her threateningly overpowering wardens. In contrast to the depiction of the father, the figure of the divine is apparently omniscient in his "reading," his insight further suggested by the knowing glance he is throwing to the female figure in the drawing. Yet the poem's collocation of "Divine" and "reads" conflates the first word with its latent transitive verb, to divine, adding a hint of conjecture to his apparently deific perspective. This is compounded by the use of the personal pronoun; "my Divine" has little of the universality we might expect from an immortal perspective.

As the speaker teasingly promises to choose between these conflicting readings, the poem further disorients us by shifting into an entirely new register and language—

A leur insu
Je suis venue
Faire mes adieux.
Adieu, adieu, adieu.

The Divine's reading is revealed as a misreading, his pretensions to omniscience subverted by the speaker's ventriloquizing of a new, coded voice, which speaks and acts "insu" (unknown) to its onlookers. The idea that he can read the subject like a book is further undermined by Stevie Smith's illustration, which, unusually, frames all three characters within an uneven rectangular box, suggesting that they themselves are on a book

cover, fit to be determined and read by yet another reader. We become the reader in the poem, overlooking the apparently divine subjects who claim to have the perspective from which they can see everything. Our superior position is only mitigated by the realization that by assuming we are the final reader, we merely perform the same misinterpretation as the poem's "divine" figure, not aware of the readers who will in turn look over our shoulder and over-read us. The phrase "to read like a book" is scrutinized with such an unflinching gaze in this poem that it ceases to be an expression of omniscience and becomes a profession of particularly sublime ignorance. To read is to submit to a perpetual process in which you are neither the first, nor the last.

In this previously unpublished drawing,⁵ Smith again presents the book as a catalyst for disruption and division, as an inscrutable object whose contents become an interpretive battleground. The book quite literally boxes its readers into corners, daring us to back down or jump. Perhaps



the only thing stopping the girl in this picture from launching herself over the precipice might be her suspicion that what the other girl holds in her hand might not be, in fact, the final word on books. The summit both girls stand on could itself be a much larger book, a yet bigger space for demonstrating control, one more frame to out-read the first. But in the absence of any poem to voice the picture's concerns, this reader is tempted to turn to the apparent certainty of biography to "close" the drawing. Here Smith describes being read to as a young girl by her elder sister Molly:

Alice in Wonderland and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* were read aloud to me when I was too young to read for myself. I remember the feel of that hot summer sultry day when Alice, sitting beside her grown-up sister, complained that the book her sister was reading was dull because it had no pictures and no conversation. And at that moment along came the White Rabbit—"Oh my whiskers and waistcoat," and off went Alice to some of the most extraordinary conversations and picture-scenes that anyone has ever thought of.⁶

Her own description of an early reading experience situates her as a young girl experientially within the text she is having read to her. Casting herself as Alice to her elder sister Molly, she becomes at last the overlooking reader. Yet if her description partakes of the nostalgic fantasy of Alice, the tension central to the drawing seems a much more likely indication of Smith's attitude toward the printed book. Later on in the essay, Smith muses "how one would like to be able to read these books again for the first time."⁷ But in Smith's constantly surveyed world, is the much valorized first reading in itself ever possible?

Smith's personal library at her death contained over a thousand volumes.⁸ Over two hundred of these were inherited from her sister Molly, handed down to her in childhood. These books, often passed back and forth between the girls, reveal a reading relationship between them that

records its antagonistic development on the margins of each page.⁹ Molly's approach to literature was largely scholarly. Her frequent underlinings and annotations in the texts she read were elucidatory, comments that summarized and explained rather than interpreted. These notes, it seems, were Molly taking on the didactic role, becoming the systematic researcher who could then pass this information on to younger, less experienced readers than herself. Smith's wish to be able to read books "for the first time" is newly resonant when considered alongside Molly's own annotating habits. Smith's first reading experiences were not only pre-empted by the voice of the older sister reading to her but were rendered graphically on the page by the fastidious notes accompanying each book she read. It is perhaps for this reason that Smith creates a role for herself in these margins as an anarchic, inscrutable reader; in her childhood copy of *Alice in Wonderland*, Smith draws a descriptive illustration on the contents page alongside each chapter heading, as if trying to navigate her way through the text by visual means, giving her the opportunity to narrate the story to herself independently without having to rely on Molly to read it to her.

Frequently, the only trace Smith left on the books she read were sketches of women's heads. In place of the comment which might record her response to a work, or at least a reaction to her sister's interpretation of it, Smith illustrates her own reading practice with a series of disembodied faces. Her drawings are usually women's portraits in profile, eyes fixed forever on the text, opinions or expressions unreadable behind thick hair, always turned away from the subsequent reader. Molly and Smith's marks almost become a collaborative enterprise, Molly's underlining of pertinent stanzas and editorial comments on translations contrasting with Smith's series of female portraits which act as mouthpieces for the text itself. In Smith's portraits we find a reader marking her territory, someone leaving a trace of herself on the page that will, nevertheless, protect her own interpretation from discovery, a process that invites

comparison with Smith's construction of a similarly inscrutable authorial persona through her own "poem-doodles." Smith's illustrations then, like her childhood graffiti, reveal the inherently combative nature of any act of reading. Her drawings for her poems offer us the book as an inscrutable point of interpretative departure.

NOTES

1. Housed in the Special Collections at the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa. Permission for all drawings and poems estate of James MacGibbon; images appear courtesy Stevie Smith Papers, The University of Tulsa–McFarlin Library, Department of Special Collections.
2. All references to Stevie Smith's poetry are to *Collected Poems*, ed. by James MacGibbon (London: Penguin, 1978).
3. Stevie Smith, *Cats in Colour* (London: Batsford, 1959), repr. in *Me Again*, pp. 134–147, 138.
4. Romana Huk describes the poem's illustration as "the most terrifying in Smith's *Collected Poems*" in *Stevie Smith: Between the Lines* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005), p. 259. Also see Huk for a discussion of the Shakespearean sources of the poem.
5. From a collection of unpublished drawings at the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa.
6. Stevie Smith, "How to Read Books" in *Discovery and Romance for Girls and Boys Vol. 2* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), pp. 267–72, 270.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
8. These are now at the University of Tulsa.
9. See for example Molly's scrawled note to Smith in her 1909 copy of John Ruskin's *Fronde agrestes*: "Cant [sic] find Heroes and Hero Worship. Perhaps you have it?", now at the McFarlin Library at the University of Tulsa.

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THIS GRUBBY STAR

Elizabeth Treadwell

sea-bright and lacy, wooded, maligned—

serene dandy rush

standard pupil

[surprise up & down towns,
the big & small clubs]

the duty farm
the hazards, the pleasure, the failures, the luck

these ancient delivery systems

counting & spelling the servant gods
stony figurine: this asphalt river of pelts,
pulled too close to the artists' tent,
every rumor
& illumination,
cagey metaphor, false coin

the stoic inimitable
[dimpled cousin of the moon]
this asphalt river of pelts

PLANKTON

for Liz Waldner

a splendid weather overtakes us
the spoiled planks we've built
only carry us so far
then it's just freshwater
fishy and dirty with years

the butter flats as we speed them
the wrought granite top some
one speaks of
the girl inside only sharpens
in weather

LUCY AT PARTIES

David B. Goldstein

Lucy is dating a boy again, a married boy, my barely married boy she calls him. She calls it "forging connections," thinks of sex as stealing a soul, the way anthropologists steal portraits from natives. "I have yours," she says, "and now I want a matching set." She brings him to one of my parties, the kind where everyone brings an overdue library book.

She introduces him as Jamie; his book is Henri Michaux, so pretentious. "Coarse civilizations spread out their feelings like dishes," he says, and goes off for some more oil-cured olives. It's not even overdue, he just brought it to show off. Lucy turns so I can see a little of her breast and tells me I am turning theoretical, looks into me and pulls a

silk scarf out of my throat. These are the kinds of openings that crack the spines of books: Lucy turning away, her eyes patting Jamie on the ass, saying well he needed a break from his wife, don't we all, and reminding me of the noise a wet tea bag makes on a glazed cup. "You didn't ask him any questions, not even about Cuba or the biosphere."

I sit down to catch my breath, only I catch another's breath and cram it into my mouth. This climate is the problem, falling every day in sluices, so gray it never gets entirely dark, the air as thick as a badly drawn character, my pansies beaten on the front lawn. In a room off the kitchen, threads of rain weave their cold garment.

Sarah Manguso

Realizing I couldn't stay in the choir unless I recovered from my crush on the countertenor, I decided to cure myself. I would focus on what most ignited my desire, and by flooding my consciousness, render the countertenor powerless over me.

But what should I focus on? It wasn't his eyes, despite the cliché, or his nose or his jaw. Was it the mouth? The upper or the lower lip? Finally I decided it was his chin that made me ache so, that wrecked my concentration and let me think of little else. I stole glances at it and kept the image in my memory, studying the exquisite chin. "It's just a chin," I told myself silently, and after a while I came to believe it.

At recess we practiced spitting, swearing, and playing Mercy. Once my best friend surprised me by sneezing voluminously onto the back of my neck. So when she stuck a big wad of gum onto my leg one afternoon, I pulled it off and put it immediately in her hair. But instead of laughing she began whining. She took the teacher's scissors and cut out a big hunk of her hair, taking the gum with it, and wouldn't speak to me for the rest of the day. I was disturbed that my friend was angry at me, but much more disturbed that the rules had somehow changed, and that the change had escaped my notice.

I don't have a hand-held video game so I bring a plastic folding watch-case with me to camp. Everyone must know it's fake, but I hold it and pretend to press little buttons inside it as if I am playing a game. Except for one boy, who doesn't seem to care. During free time, instead of sitting under a tree and wasting batteries, he walks around the field and catches wasps in a piece of plastic food wrap. When he gets about six of them, he holds them in the plastic and watches them to see what they do.

ALL KNEE-JERK, NUTS & BOLTS

Shafer Hall & Jennifer L. Knox

The only thing left's
one thing: we'll need
a grifting gypsy to read
the bumps but to work
the little buttons we won't
need brains; we won't need
a map to find an empty space
and go to it; we won't need
nothing beneath our feet,
off-center; no gravity to
keep our balance, like
from the hip, to limp home;
we won't need eyes
to blindfold each other

VOLE

Laurie Palmer

Blind as a vow, my nose has a shovel on it. I have a strong neck. I am making headway. Crumbly sand with wetter, softer, humus in my face; behind me a narrow tunnel I could be proud of but for what. It is simply how far I have come. Sometimes the tunnel behind me caves in. It doesn't matter. I can survive long periods without air. The earth is surprisingly full of air anyway, particulate and porous, unless I hit clay. The medium that I move through varies in density. Sometimes I have to spit to dissolve a little of what's ahead. My hands are webbed. They work like paddles. I am moving forward but not in a straight line. The iron in my nose shovel senses the pull of magnetic fields. These signals are often interrupted by buried electrical lines or the exploratory beeps of lonesome men swinging measuring instruments up above. But no one is watching me. I don't know how far I have come, or where I began. But I am making headway. I have nipples, little pink tits, that hurt from scraping on the grit tunnel bottom. My coarse hair grows from front to back; something terrible would happen if I backed up. I don't know when I started. May. My memory has been erased and replaced many times since then. I feel worms. I eat them. I also eat beetles along with the dirt. I could be quicker if I wasn't digesting as I dig. If I hadn't chosen to push against dirt down here, to live hidden, hard, slow, blind, unmapped. But I am telling this. I would prefer not to tell. To remain blind and speechless after disgorging. But I can't help myself. My movements reverberate. I feel those reverberations as a second effect. I need to comment. My method? Momentum (or inertia?), sensory involvement in empirical research, refusal of the metaphor of light (to "uncover," to "discover," to "reveal," to "clarify," to "make apparent") and myths of progress (as if the present is related to the past in an uninterrupted litany of cause and effect). As if transparency were possible, or revelation anything other than a shudder in the heart. My nose is a tool and a guide,

the tubular digestive tract my mechanical shovel, filter, and mind; my tiny webbed feet work with the force of monster tractor tires—slow, unwieldy, inexorable. Encountering resistance in every direction, my work is joyful, I am making a path, but not necessarily one that could (or ought) to (ever) be followed. Making space, temporarily. When I break into a network of other tunnels, and space is amplified a thousand times by linking up to the work of others, my exaltation is almost equal to my surprise and disorientation.

FIVE NOTES

Marc Gaba

Did I buy it | Was I bought
Who | is responsible for beauty?
Show of hands | underwater

Walking between Church, Fairchild
Streets | graves | read as
similar hungers | thrown

Is it my work then | to bury
the image | of logic | in language
the missing roads | it keeps

Imagine | Promise
My mouth | sea of ink | can change anything
but why | it means why

If and Then | in wind hurl at each
other | your clocks | one to each eye
if all seen is twice | not once enough

IN THE INTERPRETED WORLD

even love letters blush thought by thought irreversible the way "I can

love you" can't describe but exacts *the summoned eye*

*is of the body but not flesh, is more lost than any heart or wherever you keep yours,
"yours" is the cold word that meets "mine" by reason too understood, too happy, too dumb,
reason might as well be*

| an empty swing | *and when*

| photographed

| is nobody's business

| "beautiful"

though only

| if in

black & white &

back

| then

to the tireless symmetries | wrong & right, love &

love

| click

and the sudden

| answers

sing, listening for something away

| and something is away

with the blood of the living

and a supply of color rushes to the eyes no further

| to meet it

is

| whose pleasure Not

ours but did you want it for yourself I know I did

| such a small secret

not "pray"

| happens all the time

and if not Then we show up to leave | happens *all the time* why think
you can requite did you really think you can justify beauty with your mouth this is answerable by yes or no
or a mistake—to have said so or not | should have passed for home | you cross the sea

WHEREIN A SURROGATE IS DETERMINED PRIME

Danielle Pafunda

When the artifact came to skim my cavity, I was,
they said, to follow the protocol. To respond *I*
am well and to ask no questions In the sprint of offer.
With the decibel, she would scan me
for tumors, distaffs, and darkling. Divine
the collateral on which they would base the procedure.

And though she was rarely seen, and though
they insisted otherwise, it was my intent to refuse
for you a protection. If only the cotton batting
had dissolved and my enzymes been plant or animal.
In addition to mineral. I could not have known
the choke beforehand. I cannot now stall the choke.

THE LAKE

Nelly Reifler

slide 1: an exit off a highway. green sign with silver reflective letters:
lakes.

narrator 1: it was a longer drive than we'd expected. or maybe i should say
than i'd expected. i don't know what she expected. she had been so quiet
for a while, for weeks before we headed out there.

slide 2: dirt road winding through tall forest of locust and birch trees.
brown bark. white bark.

narrator 1: maybe she didn't expect anything.

narrator 2: it had gotten to a point where i couldn't speak.

slide 3: a gray wooden house. collapsed gazebo off to the side. ivy grown
over the door.

narrator 1: my great uncle said we could live in his girlfriend's cousin's
house until things got better. until we got back on our feet. the house was
not as comfortable as we'd hoped.

narrator 2: he had this idea of running away to a little cabin on a lake. he
didn't realize that anything we did together was bound to be wrong, to
fall apart, to be haunted and tainted and cursed.

narrator 1: or maybe i should say *as i'd hoped*.

slide 4: the lake. a flat gray sky, dingy sunlight, reflecting off its still
surface.

slide 5: the lake. like black glass. a low three-quarter moon reflecting off its still surface.

slide 6: the forest. anemic sunlight filtering through the high leaves.

narrator 2: one day, soon after we arrived, i went for a walk alone in the woods. while i walked, i kept thinking i heard something echoing my steps. i'd step on a twig. a second later, i'd hear a similar snap nearby. i'd look around, right, left, over my shoulder. nothing. the woods had a pungent smell, the smell of rot. it should have repelled me, but instead i found myself opening my nostrils to suck it in more fully.

slide 7: interior. living room, haphazardly cleaned: we can see the streaks where the broom passed over the dusty floor. dilapidated sofa. a pile of books on the floor.

slide 8: close up. pile of books. their spines: *theories and practices of everyday life; deconstructing individuality structures; the question of authorship; the document as gender construct and conduit.*

narrator 1: i was starting to make a little headway on my dissertation.

slide 6 (repeat): the forest. anemic sunlight filtering through the high leaves.

narrator 2: after that first walk, i started to spend more and more time in the woods. each time, i'd circle out further and further from the house. i'd always get lost, but that was part of it. i liked getting lost, i longed to get more lost. i found myself hoping i'd get so lost i would never find my way back.

narrator 1: she still wasn't speaking very much, but it seemed as if she was connecting with nature. she took a lot of walks.

slide 9: a clearing. very green grass. a cherry tree. blackberry bushes. day lilies half-open around the circumference.

narrator 2: i found a place that i called the doe garden. when i first happened upon it, i thought it must have been cultivated by a person. the next day, i couldn't find it at all. the following day, though, i came across it again, from a different path. this time, a doe and a fawn were nibbling at the blackberry bushes, and i realized it was deer that trimmed the grass, that kept the brambles tidy, that plucked the cherries before they fell. i stood very still just outside the circle. the next day i returned just as a stag was leaving. his horns were long, though one was broken at the end. when i was all alone, i lay down on the grass. i closed my eyes. i imagined that the grass was touching me, that it liked the texture of my skin.

slide 10: close up: a pink plastic dinner plate. dregs of tomato sauce and a few leftover pieces of spaghetti.

narrator 2: when i say i called it the doe garden, i mean i just called it that inside my head. i didn't tell him anything. i wished things were different. i wished i could make myself tell him about the woods. i'd even open my mouth to speak now and then, but i couldn't make the sounds come out.

slide 8 (repeat): close up. pile of books. their spines: *theories and practices of everyday life; deconstructing individuality structures; the question of authorship; the document as gender construct and conduit.*

narrator 1: i was starting to make a little headway on my dissertation.

narrator 2: i was still angry about what had happened. i couldn't figure out who was to blame. i couldn't speak.

slide 11: close up: blood on grass.

narrator 2: one day, i arrived just after a doe had given birth. i stood in my place outside the circle and watched her lick off her new fawn. i was trembling, and my throat ached from holding back tears. the fawn stood, also trembling, on its skinny legs, knock-kneed. the afterbirth dropped out of the doe; she turned her head quite casually and ate most of it. it all happened very fast. the fawn nursed for a few minutes, and then the doe and her fawn wandered away. i entered the clearing and went over to the place where the afterbirth had fallen on the grass. i couldn't help myself. i squatted down and put my fingers in the one of the scraps that she left behind. it was still a little warm, soft, wet. i licked my fingers. it tasted strong, bloody but not only like blood; gamey.

slide 12: the lake. like black glass. a full moon reflecting off its still surface.

narrator 1: she didn't know that i woke up almost every night and watched her sleeping. sometimes i wanted to touch her, to jostle her and tell her i was sorry. i wanted to qualify the things i'd said to her before we left the old place—that every relationship was really about power, that the body is purely a biological entity and that feelings are functions of the interplay between the nervous system and hormones, that love was a cultural construct. and that stupid argument when i said there was no such thing as a pure document. i never did, though. but as i watched her sleep, i tried to send my apology into her head through her closed eyelids.

slide 13: the forest. bright sunlight filtering through the high leaves.

narrator 2: i went back to the garden, hoping to see the mother and baby again. i never reached the garden by the same route; i still got lost, and always approached it from a different direction. i found it by picturing

it inside my head, by daydreaming an image of its circle of soft grass, its lilies, its cherries as i walked.

slide 14: close up. blood and fur on grass.

narrator 2: this time i wound up behind the blackberry bushes. as i leaned in toward the clearing, i heard strange noises—whimpering sort of growls. first i saw a wide path of blood across the middle of the grass circle. then i saw them: two gray dogs with bloody muzzles. they were not big dogs, but their muscles rippled beneath their sleek coats. their jaws were long, and they snapped at what was left of the carcass of a stag. it was the same stag i had spotted before, with the broken horn.

slide 15: a suburban backyard. clothes drying on a line. red tricycle. fence semi-collapsed in one corner.

narrator 2: i had been afraid of dogs ever since i was about five years old and the neighbor's doberman had come over into our yard and trapped me in the corner with the spider webs. but in spite of the way these dogs looked and what they were doing, i wasn't scared. i clapped my hands, and they stopped eating for a second or two. they turned their heads in my direction. one of them wagged his tail a couple times. then they went back to their meal. i watched as they slowed down and then finally stopped eating. they licked each other's faces. one of them picked up the stag's torn-off lower leg, with the foot attached, and the dogs began to amble away by a path on the other side of the clearing. i pushed my way through the brambles, getting all scratched up in the process . . .

slide 16: the forest. late afternoon sunlight filtering through the high leaves.

narrator 2: . . . and followed the dogs through the woods. they moved slowly. i kept my eyes on their silver hair. they led me to . . .

slide 17: long shot. foreground: a beach on the edge of the lake. brown sand. beyond the beach, water. on the opposite shore: trees. in the sky: a low sun, its edge just touching the treetops.

narrator 2: . . . a beach. at first i thought it was a different lake from the one behind our house, but looking around carefully, i saw that it was the same one. i recognized, far down the shore, the same broken red rowboat that was docked on an abandoned pier across from our bedroom windows.

slide 18: close up. brown sand.

narrator 2: the dog that was carrying the leg buried it deep in the fine, damp sand. then both dogs waded into the water. i walked across the beach toward them. they splashed around. i came closer to the edge. just as the soles of my shoes touched water, the dogs came crashing out again. they jumped up on me, pushing at me with their paws, and they licked my arms, my chin. i heard a whistle, a shrill, summoning whistle, and then a voice calling the dogs. the dogs dropped back down to the sand and started to trot in the direction of the voice. i followed them again.

slide 19: a piece of lined notebook paper, creased, next to an envelope on unmade bed.

narrator 1: that first night when she didn't come home, i was so freaked out, i called the police. they told me i'd have to wait forty-eight hours to file a report. i called her parents and left a message. i called my parents, even though they happened to be on vacation in italy at the time. i woke them up in their hotel room. then her parents called me back and said she had also left a message, one they'd thought was odd. they said she was laughing in the message: they heard her laughing before she started talking. they'd thought it was odd how she said, 'i'm just calling to let you know i'm fine.' i couldn't have slept more than three hours, but when i woke up,

the envelope was there. she must have slipped it under the front door. at first i thought i was going to kill myself. but of course, i didn't. it was really a lesson for me: the only thing you can count on is your work.

MEMORY

Kaethe Schwehn

I am not going to church I am wearing my church clothes and carrying a flour sack filled with four dead rabbits. The fur of the rabbits is matted with blood and the rabbits are matted together in one lump that knocks against me every time I move my right leg forward. All the muscles in my right forearm ache. My left forearm is weightless, hanging away from my body for balance. I am too old for this to be my first memory I am seventeen. My father behind me carries in his hand four nightgowns, one from each of my sisters. My sisters are still small enough the nightgowns don't drag in the dust. We stop for a moment to rest. My father rolls a sappy cottonwood bud between his fingers then puts his fingers to my nose. Smell that he says.

Nearby are the Stellar jays that hover near the winter trash. And winter. We keep our trash in the broken school bus in our backyard until someone can come to pick it up. I love the owls calling to each other across the snow. My mother was like that. She mixed poison by color. Below our dinner plates each night a picture from a magazine she cut. Sometimes a man on vertical, face framed by fur, water freezing in his lashes. Sometimes a flower sans hummingbird or bee. When she pushed me toward my father she put a handful of dimes from the freezer in each of my pockets. The cold noses into my thighs.

from THIS ELIZABETH

Lesley Yalen

At the movies, everybody is desirable. Every blonde is desirable, every brunette is desirable, every doctor is desirable, every dead. Every black man is desirable, every white space is desirable, every warden is desirable, as well as all the sympathetic death row killers. The King of Siam in surround sound is desirable—ever after. All the great characters: the politician's mistress, the redeemer-teacher, the troubled teen, the newborn, the brute.

After the movies, there is sadness upon
sadness on the street sadness upon sadness in
the kitchen street upon street in the night
kitchen upon kitchen upon night. Life upon
death death and the like. Life upon every
street everywhere. Death upon every kitchen
everywhere. This upon that you upon you you
upon you screen upon screen every screen
allowing only one color of the colorful image
through. Scene upon scene actors upon
actresses, desirable flat likenesses of the seen.
After the movies, the jarred back being has
something in common with the actors and
actresses and something not. Being without
hair. This is no longer common. Being without
the tresses of actresses.

In each season, there is joy or no joy strain or no strain or joy upon joy or strain upon strain or joy upon strain or strain upon joy but always there are movies, and the actors and actresses are able to be desired. Not every person in every profession is so able, though the sounds of cell phones provide the illusion of a well-loved public. Now everyone is able to be reached every day. The number of phones heard in a lifetime has peaked and the effect is a kinetic disorder which causes the heart to be chronically mildly on fire. Answering the phone is like having your ticket torn. Having your ticket torn is a dramatic prerequisite for entrance. Inside the telephone is a tiny talker, a husband, who has not been able to be desired for years and who does not desire his wife though she is able. The wife needs to be pressed upon as she dies. She needs near. The husband needs to stay in Antarctica to catch the peak season; anyone should be able to understand the importance of his work for everyone. Actors and actresses are nearly needless. They and the tiny husband are commonly on screens and the wife is also on a screen and no screen is near another screen.

CELLAR

Amy McNamara

a single bulb
day or night
and rows and rows
of shelves for storing
the dolls "Cipher," "Gist,"
"Drift" and the hard-to-find
blonde "Infinity"
still in boxes
plastic intact

their man-friends "Matter"
and "Thrust"
the sports car
& townhouse
the beach Snack-Shack
"Lingua-Frank-a"
& its mini mustard jars
& teeny skinny-necked catsup bottles

what they must be worth!

RONALD JOHNSON'S "KNITTING: POEMS 1906–1966 BY X. LAX"

In 1966, Ronald Johnson was living in England with Jonathan Williams. As it had been in 1963, when they lived in England for the first time, their life in 1966 was peripatetic: they traveled through the countryside visiting poets and artists. Among their mutual friends were Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006) and his wife Sue. Finlay was editing at the time a poetry newsletter whose name, *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.*, was taken from a Robert Creeley poem. It served to intensify the concrete poetry movement, as Finlay perceived it, that was emerging at the time. Johnson was a regular contributor to *P.O.T.H.* (as it was abbreviated), and through Finlay's outreach, he was connected to the wider world of concrete poetry.

On September 8, 1966, Johnson typed a letter to Finlay from the George Inn in Hubberhome. In the letter, he relates a visit to Rivaulx Terrace, in North Yorkshire, with its two temples connected by an elegant mowed green, and then a lunch of cold duck and baked potatoes with Herbert Read and his wife, followed by a visit to the ruins of Fountains Abbey. Next, he writes:

Jonathan has just finished his 50th, I believe, one word poem. And I send on my own wee ones—rather serious as you requested—& a Robert Lax parody which is not. Serious that is. Surely there is Ex-Lax in this country which will explain the Poems 1906–66 & poems such as SITTING, etc. Maybe I shall send it to the J. F. to have his students do. Twould look well with a knitted cover don't you think?

Finlay was soliciting one-word poems from his various correspondents to publish them in *P.O.T.H.* Both Finlay and Johnson had benefited from an association with British artist and designer John Furnival, whose work at

the time was strongly connected to concrete poetry, and who had produced editions of both of the poets' works, sometimes with the help of his art students. In spite of his casual tone, it is likely that Johnson produced these parodic poems with such a lavishly imagined edition in mind.

Robert Lax (1915–2000) was a mysterious figure in poetry in the sixties and would remain so until the end of his life. He is best known for his friendship with Thomas Merton, with whom he was a student at Columbia University in the 1930s, and, following his friend's lead, for his subsequent conversion to Catholicism. While Merton retreated from the world to Gethsemane, Kentucky, into a Trappist monastery, where he would become world-famous, Lax ventured from New York to Marseilles, eventually finding a home on Patmos, in the Greek islands, always living close to the bone, in obscurity, and always writing poetry. In the early 1960s, Lax came upon the mode that would define his work for nearly forty years—an unrepentant, unambiguous minimalism built on key repetitions of a small handful of words. Sometimes these poems are short, as in "river," which repeats the word *river* in four three-lined stanzas; sometimes in longer, sprawling poems, such as "Sea & Sky" (in which you'll find "the/light//the/light//is/on//the/sea" repeated six times on one page), originally published in 1963 in the *Lugano Review*, which also published "Autumn," from Johnson's *Book of the Green Man* in 1966.¹ Although they were not quite part of the same strain of Modernist/Post-modernist poetry, Lax and Johnson were certainly obscure in the same way, dedicated to producing uncompromising work. Which makes Johnson's desire to parody Lax a bit perplexing.

An ode, traditionally, is a poem of praise. A parody is something alongside praise, sometimes loving, sometimes snarling. Johnson's parody of Lax's poems seems a good imitation of Lax's style. And Lax's strange name provides the poet an irresistible scatological pun. I'm not, after all, confident I can explain why Johnson would choose to parody Lax, whose work

posed a threat neither to Johnson nor to Finlay. Did Finlay laugh over these, I wonder. They *are* delightful poems, exemplary of the joy Johnson took in poetry and the cleverness with which he could express that joy, as in "Self-portrait in Petit-point," in which the X of his fictive Lax's name generates the pattern that patches poetry and needlepoint together. And in the overall playfulness of the poems, Johnson shows himself to be quite familiar with the handicraft of knitting. But it remains unclear to me why he thought Lax should be parodied.

Which perhaps explains why these poems of Johnson's have lain in letters mainly unseen for forty years. What harm can come from airing them now? If there is an Elysium, surely Lax and Johnson have been involved in a conversation of some sort in which they may have even shared a laugh over these poems.

Peter O'Leary
August 2006, Chicago

1. See "Sea & Sky," in Robert Lax, 33 *Poems*, ed. Thomas Kellein (New York: New Directions, 1988).

The George Inn
Hubberhome

Dear Ian, Sue too--

I am writing on a strange, indeed curious, typewriter & everytime I put my hand on what I thought were keys they turn out to be beetles wth minds (& several more legs ~~if~~ than one can imagine) of their own.

We had a most exciting day yesterday--the weather clear with only mare's-tails for clouds & we set off to see Herbert Read via the most beautiful abbeys in the country. Yes, for all the 19th century Tinterniana now that the National Trust has clipped the grass close as sheeps & taken off all the grass swags & festoons of ivies its bare bones are not nearly as exciting as Rivaux: all springing arches out of a green shining lake of grass. And then up to Rivaux Terrace where there are two temples connected by a high rather golfiste 'green', the one, inside, one of the most beautiful rooms in England with a domed painted ceiling painted by some Italian Mole who was paid by the Earl a golden sovereign a day (why is it always a gold coin--& only one?) & who, of course, died doing the job. Poor mole, flat on his back. . . . Fantastically furnished, everything eagles holding something with claws or ~~with~~ damsels distressed to hold such curious things on their heads.

Then to the R~ads for a superb lunch of cold duck & baked potatoes with aioli & mocha mousse. And coffee out of the sunny, lavender terrace among the bees. Afterwards, then, to Fountains Abbey which is now a real ruin rather than a folly on the grounds of a country house & terribly romantick among moon pools, & half-moon pools & with a strange & most startling green man with roots coming out of his mouth.

OT

Jonathan has just finished his 50th, I believe, one word poem. And I send on my own wee ones--rather serious as you requested--& a Robert Lax parody which is not. Serious that is. Surely there is Ex-Lax in this country which will explain the Poems 1906-66 & poems such as SITTING, &c.

Maybe I shall send it to the J.F. to have his
students do. Twould look well with a knitted
cover don't you think?

The teeltes get more
mulish. . .I can't go on. . .

Luv to all,

Donald Johnson

KNITTING

Poems 1906-1966

by X. Lax

KNITTING

1

knit
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knit
knit

2

knitknit
knitknit
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3

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4

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10

k	k i
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k	k i
k	n t
k	k i
k	

11

k
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k
k
k

ZEN KNOTTING

1

knot	knot	knot
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knot	knot	knot
knot	knot	knot

2

not	not	not
not	not	not
not	not	not
not	not	not
not	not	not

KNITTING JUST LIKE MOTHER (NATURE) USED TO DO

I

gnat nit gnat nit
nit gnat nit gnat
gnat nit gnat nit
nit gnat nit gnat
gnat nit gnat nit
nit gnat nit gnat

II

1

gnat gnat

2

gnatknotgnat

3

gnat gnat

gnat

gnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

gnatgnatgnat

III

1

nut

2

nut

KNITTING FOR BEGINNERS

net	net	net
	net	net
net	net	net
	net	net
net	net	net

SITTING

1

knot

2

knot

3

knot

4

not

5

knot

6

not?

7

not

8

knot

9

knot

10

not
not
not

11

not!
not!
not!

12

knot

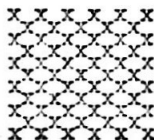
13

knot?

ROGOCO KNITTING

knitnutknitnut
nutgnatnutgnat
knotnutknotnut
nutknitnutknit
gnatnutgnatnut
nutknotnutknot
knitnutknitnut

SELF PORTRAIT IN PETIT-POINT



WE'RE CHANGING IRONY

Jack Christian

We're changing our heads to mean *slightly off*.
When we stand, we struggle with our knees
because the fuzz has filleted the equilibrium in our eyes,
which, did we mention? are slightly out.
We're counting with their fingers that are grossly out.
We're thinking in our temples, which means
bad news for gaffs.
We're clapping with our feet that are mostly crunched,
and in our treehouse, well, there are some secret rituals.
And in our pillow fort, we're shooping all the poetasters out.
We're pleading with our fabrications,
which are highly miffed.
We're talking Paul Bunyan in our voices
that are sort-of ripped. (But when a larynx goes to chirping
we remember to spit the tadpoles out.)
When the designer sends frowns,
we loom in rain we've tuned to melt.
We're pending in a motion that is tacitly illicit.
The tenacity in our torsos is what we deserve
for being so frank about it.
We're caterwauling in the wind while our children pout.
We're grouping our hounds and making sweet music
with flashlights, and nobody's shocked.
We've sharpened our followers.
We've killed our socks.

RESULTS OF THE POLYGRAPH: A CONDITIONAL RORSCHACH BLOT OR THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WHAT IF & WHEN

Ed Pavlič

if this was a wet blouse
there'd be the shadow of fingers
if a leaf poured from a can
of paint there'd be veins
stiffened by the cold if this
was summer wind there'd be laughter
from across the lake if an
abandoned well it'd smell of broken
stone & you'd look down
in the dark for the loose end
of frayed rope if this was
a rusty nail there'd be a little
boy licking red dust
from his fingers if I was 13
again it'd be a simple matter
of off & on drag the pen
& pain runs down the block
if he was 20 again he'd have cut
himself & gone in after it
fist into brick if the angle was
right it'd move thru the flesh
like a song climbs swole & yellow

up past the elbow if a novel
there'd be a scream's chance
of meeting again somewhere
unthinkable if it were mine
one of us would miss the other
in an empty street there'd
be the panic of living
again the act like I knew
far more than I did if
these were letters to you
they'd be in the well
if breached inside
there'd be ash on the hips
& rattlesnake tea
when Paul Wittgenstein
returned from the war
the family refused to pay Ravel
for what he wrote to the phantom
right hand often we find
simply from impact reasonable
persons infer decisions
on the part of others
if she'd told me she needed
two things to count on
there'd have been
these at least : if it hadn't been
for the broken guitar string
her hair'd have blown
left to right across her face
into my mouth & no one would ask
me what I said if
I spoke any louder than this here

COCTEAU'S TWINS

Tomaž Šalamun

The first one announces the second one with an inversion,
it's a secret. He cannot use the material shapes. The richest
ecosystems and the strongest memories are dust.

In the snow. In the spring, snowdrifts to mark
the time and the place. There, far away, are the houses
with lights, the village boys who will help us out

of the snowdrift. God licks all his flowers. The mass
of spinning love is in every tree trunk. The blood
elongates his face. The warming sun doesn't get black.

The swamp is in the cocoon, the fast broad-shouldered
walks among gadflies, the villages built for movies,
the black Ig River water. First the horseshoe

on the cleated boot, the heel tatters, the trouser leg
is bound around the limb with reeds. The macadam
presses the flour and the bone to the vaults. The virgin

is taken as booty. There's no boiling point. How the white
kerchief, wrapped around Mother Nature's scalp
extinguishes a fire. We were sitting on the rue du Bac.

I went to the dead scalp on your lips, to ignite
the dream machine. Don't worry about the sun's orbit.
The breath of blue turns black before an explosion of gold.

GOD

God boils and observes.
He steps in the honey with his head.
He soaks his beard in kasha.
When he makes mountains, they flash.

He drills his thorn. He has.
He washes his hardened brushes.
He wipes his face and eyes,
so the world will be silent and mute.

He opens its window.
When he makes a noise with the windowpane,
the putty, the glass,
we know it: impressed.

Translated from the Slovenian by Joshua Beckman and the author.

from *THE BOOK OF THE LOVER AND THE BELOVED*

Ramon Llull

HOW THE HERMIT BLAQUERNA CAME TO WRITE *THE BOOK OF THE LOVER AND THE BELOVED*

It happened one day that the hermit, who was in Rome, as we said before, went to visit the other hermits and recluses living there, and found that they had many temptations regarding certain things because they did not know how to live in the manner best fitting their state. So he thought he would go to Blaquerne and ask him to make a book about the life of a hermit, so that through this book he would know how to keep the other hermits in contemplation and devotion. One day when Blaquerne was in prayer the hermit came to his cell and asked him to write the above-mentioned book. Blaquerne thought a long time about the manner in which he would make the book, and the matter he would put into it.

Thinking in this way he decided to give himself over to the worship and contemplation of God, so that in prayer God might show him the manner and matter to be used in the book. While Blaquerne was thus worshipping and weeping, and when God had made his soul rise to the furthest limit of its strength in contemplation of him, Blaquerne felt himself overwhelmed by the great fervor and devotion he had, and he thought to himself that the force of love is overwhelming when the lover loves the beloved very intensely. Therefore Blaquerne decided to make a book, *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, in which the lover would be a faithful and devout Christian and the beloved would be God.

While Blaquerna was thinking in this way, he remembered that once, when he was pope, a Saracen had told him that the Saracens had certain religious men, among whom the most highly considered were those called "sufis," and that these men had words of love and brief examples which aroused great devotion in men. These are words which require exposition, and by their exposition the understanding rises up higher, and carries the will with it, increasing its devotion. Now when Blaquerna had heard this idea, he decided to make the book in the above-mentioned manner, and he told the hermit to return to Rome, and that in a short time he would send him, through the deacon, *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, and with this book he would be able to increase fervor and devotion in the hermits, whom he wished to inspire with a love of God.

PROLOGUE

Blaquerna was in prayer, and he thought about the manner in which he contemplated God and his virtues, and when he finished his prayers he wrote down the manner in which he had contemplated God. And he did this every day, bringing new reasoning to his prayers, so that he could compose *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved* in many different manners, and that these would be brief, so that in a short time the soul could reflect on many of them.

And with God's blessing, Blaquerna began the book, which he divided into as many verses as there are days in the year. And each verse suffices for an entire day of contemplation of God, according to the art of the *Book of Contemplation*.

HERE BEGIN THE MORAL METAPHORS

1. The lover asked his beloved if there remained anything in him still to be loved. And the beloved answered that he still had to love that by which his own love could be increased.

2. The paths along which the lover seeks his beloved are long, perilous, filled with worries, sighs, and tears, and lit up by love.

3. Many lovers gathered together to love one beloved who filled them with love. Each held as his own his beloved and his pleasant thoughts, which caused tribulations that were sweet to bear.

4. The lover wept, and said: "When will darkness leave the world, and the paths to hell cease to exist? When will water, which always flows downward, change its nature and flow upward? And when will the innocent outnumber the guilty?"

7. The beloved tested his lover to see if his love was perfect, asking him what was the difference between the presence and absence of his beloved. The lover replied, "As ignorance and forgetfulness differ from knowledge and remembrance."

8. The beloved asked the lover, "Can you remember any way in which I have rewarded you for wanting to love me?" "Yes," he answered, "by making no distinction between the pains and pleasures you accord me."

9. "Tell me, lover," said the beloved, "will you still be patient if I double your suffering?" "Yes, as long as you also double my love."

16. "Tell us, O singing bird, have you put yourself in the care of my beloved so that he may protect you from lack of love, and increase your love?" The bird replied, "And who is it who makes me sing, if not the lord of love, for whom lack of love is a dishonor?"

18. A question arose between the eyes and memory of the lover. His eyes claimed it was better to see the beloved than to remember him, but memory said that remembering brought tears to the eyes and made the heart burn with love.

19. The lover asked Understanding and Will which one was closer to his beloved. They both started running, and Understanding reached his beloved before Will.

21. Sighs and Tears came to be judged by the beloved, and asked him by which of them he felt more deeply loved. The beloved judged that sighs were closer to love, and tears to the eyes.

22. The lover came to drink from the fountain whose waters make those who do not love fall in love, and his suffering was doubled. The beloved then came to drink from the fountain so as to redouble the lover's love of him, and increase his suffering even more.

23. The lover was sick, and the beloved cared for him. He fed him from his merits, gave him to drink with love, put him to bed with patience, dressed him with humility, and gave him truth as his medicine.

25. They said to the lover, "Where are you going?" "I come from my beloved." "Where do you come from?" "I go to my beloved." "When will you return?" "I will be with my beloved." "How long will you be with your beloved?" "For as long as my thoughts remain on him."

26. The birds sang of the dawn, and the lover, who is the dawn, awoke. The birds ended their song, and the lover died in the dawn for his beloved.

30. The lover disobeyed his beloved, and the lover wept. The beloved came and died within the lover's cloak, so that the lover might regain what he had lost. And the gift he gave him was greater than that which he had lost.

35. "Tell me, O bird who sings of love to my beloved, why does he who has taken me as his servant torment me with love?" The bird answered, "If you did not suffer the pains of love, how else would you love your beloved?"

36. The lover followed the paths of his beloved absorbed in thought. He tripped and fell among the thorns, and it seemed to him that they were flowers and that he lay on a bed of love.

38. Tearfully the lover sang songs of his beloved. He sang that love was quicker in the lover's heart than the brilliance of lightning to the eye, or thunder to the ear; that water had more vitality in tears than in the sea's waves, and that sighs were closer to love than was whiteness to snow.

47. The lover sat alone in the shade of a handsome tree. Some men passed by and asked him why he was alone. The lover answered that it was only when he had seen and heard them that he had been alone, but before that he had been in the company of his beloved.

52. The lover saw himself captured and bound, wounded and killed, for love of his beloved. His tormentors asked him, "Where is your beloved now?" He replied, "You can see him in the increase of my love, and in the strength it gives me to bear my torments."

54. The lover went through the city like a fool, singing of his beloved, and he was asked if he had lost his mind. He answered that his beloved had taken his will, and he had given him his understanding, so he had nothing left but his memory, with which he remembered his beloved.

55. The beloved said, "It would be a miracle against love if the lover were to fall asleep and forget his beloved." The lover replied, "And it would be a miracle against love if the beloved were not to wake the lover, since he had desired him."

59. The lover went on his way, desiring his beloved, when he met two friends who greeted and embraced and kissed each other with love and tears. And the lover fainted, so strongly did the two friends remind him of his beloved.

64. The lover asked his beloved to pay him for the time he had served him. The beloved added up the thoughts, tears, yearnings, trials, and dangers his lover had suffered for love of him. The beloved added eternal happiness to the account, and gave himself as payment to his lover.

65. The lover was asked the meaning of happiness. He replied that it was unhappiness borne for love.

67. The lover was gazing at a place where he had once seen his beloved, and he said, "O, place that recalls the beautiful ways of my beloved! Will you tell him that for his love I suffer hardship and sorrow?" The place answered, "When your beloved was here, he suffered greater hardship and sorrow than any other hardship and sorrow which love can give to its servants."

74. "Tell us, fool, which existed first, your heart, or love?" He answered that his heart and love came into being at the same time, for if they had not, the heart would not have been made for love, nor love made for reflection.

75. They asked the fool where his love first began, whether with the secrets of his beloved, or with his revealing them to the people. He answered that love, when it is perfect, makes no such distinctions. Secretly the lover keeps secret his beloved's secrets, and secretly he also reveals them, and with revealing them keeps them secret still.

76. The secrets of love, when unrevealed, cause pain and suffering. The revelation of love brings fervor and fear. Thus the lover must suffer in either case.

78. The lover cried out to the people, saying that love commanded them to love when awake or asleep, when walking or sitting, when speaking or when silent, when buying or selling, laughing or crying, in gain or in loss, in joy or in sorrow. In whatever they might do they must love, for this was love's commandment.

81. The lover sent letters to his beloved, asking if there were another lover who could help him endure the great pains he suffered for his love. And the beloved wrote back and told his lover there was no way that he could fail or wrong him.

84. "Tell us, fool, what do you mean by a marvel?" He answered, "To love things absent more than things present, and to love visible, corruptible things more than invisible, incorruptible ones."

87. An excess of thoughts caused the lover suffering and sorrow, and he begged his beloved to send him a book describing his features, in the hope that this would provide some help. The beloved sent the book to his lover, and the lover's trials and suffering were doubled.

88. The lover was sick with love, and a doctor came to see him. The doctor increased his suffering and his thoughts, and then the lover was healed.

91. The beloved revealed himself to his lover clothed in new crimson robes. He held out his arms so he could embrace him, he lowered his head so he could kiss him, and he remained on high so he could always be found.

97. The lover was asked to whom he belonged. He answered, "To love." "What are you made of?" "Of love." "Who gave birth to you?" "Love." "Where were you born?" "In love." "Who brought you up?" "Love." "How do you live?" "By love." "What is your name?" "Love." "Where do you come from?" "From love." "Where are you going?" "To love." "Where are you

now?" "In love." "Have you anything other than love?" "Yes, I have faults and wrongs against my beloved." "Is there pardon in your beloved?" The lover said that in his beloved were mercy and justice, and that he therefore lived between fear and hope.

98. The beloved left the lover, and the lover sought him in his thoughts and asked people about him in the language of love.

102. The beloved came to stay at the lover's lodgings, and the steward demanded payment from him. But the lover said that his beloved was to be lodged without charge.

109. "Love tormented me until I told him you were present in my torments. Love then lessened my suffering, and you, as a reward, increased love, which doubled my torments."

110. "On the path of love I met with another lover who was silent. Pale and thin, suffering and weeping, he reproached love, and made accusations against him. Love excused himself with loyalty, hope, patience, devotion fortitude, temperance, and happiness. I therefore reproached the lover for crying out against love when love had given him such wonderful gifts."

112. The lover was walking in a foreign land, where he thought he would find his beloved, when he was attacked on the road by two lions. The lover feared death, for he wanted to live in order to serve his beloved. He sent his memory to his beloved, so that love would be with him during his passage, and help him withstand death. While the lover was remembering his beloved, the lions came up to him humbly and licked the tears from his weeping eyes, and kissed his hands and feet. And the lover continued in peace in search of his beloved.

113. The lover wandered over mountains and valleys, but could find no

place to escape from the prison in which love held captive his body, his thoughts, and all his desires and joys.

114. While the lover was wandering in this troubled way, he came upon a hermit asleep near a lovely spring. The lover awakened the hermit, and asked him if he had seen his beloved in his dreams. The hermit answered that his thoughts were held captive in love's prison equally whether he was awake or asleep. The lover was very pleased to have found a fellow-prisoner, and they both wept, for the beloved had few such lovers.

117. The lover and the beloved met, and their greetings, embraces, kisses, weeping, and tears bore witness to their meeting. The beloved asked the lover how he was, and the lover felt confused in the presence of his beloved.

118. The lover and the beloved quarreled, and their loves made peace between them. And the question arose: which love gave most of itself?

119. The lover loved all those who feared his beloved, and feared all those who did not fear him. It was therefore a question as to which was greater in the lover, love or fear.

120. The lover strove to follow his beloved, and he came to a path with a fierce lion who killed anyone passing by indolently and without devotion.

121. The lover said, "He who does not fear my beloved should fear all things. But he who does fear my beloved should be bold and daring in all things."

123. Love lit up the cloud placed between the lover and the beloved, and made it as bright and shining as the moon by night, the morning star at

dawn, the sun by day, and understanding in the will. And it is through this shining cloud that the lover and beloved speak to each other.

127. "Ah, Understanding and Will! Bark and awaken the large dogs who are asleep, forgetting my beloved. Weep, O eyes! Sigh, O heart! And Memory—remember the dishonor of my beloved at the hands of those he so honored."

130. With pen of love, water of tears, and on paper of suffering, the lover wrote letters to his beloved, telling him that devotion was late in coming, that love was dying, and that sin and error were ever increasing his enemies.

132. The lover lay in a bed of love. His sheets were made of joys, his coverlet of sorrows, and his pillow of tears. And the question was whether the cloth of the pillow was the same as that of the sheets, or as that of the coverlet.

133. The beloved dressed his lover in a tunic, vest, and cape. He made him a hat of love, a shirt of thoughts, stockings of tribulations, and a garland of tears.

134. The beloved begged his lover not to forget him. The lover said he could not forget him since he could not be without knowledge of him.

147. God created the night for the lover to keep vigil and reflect upon the perfections of his beloved, and the lover thought it had been created so that those wearied by love could rest and sleep.

159. Love sank the lover into sorrow through too much reflection. The beloved sang, and the lover rejoiced when he heard him. The question is, which of the two proved a greater occasion for an increase of love in the lover?

160. The secrets of the beloved are revealed in the secrets of the lover, and the secrets of the lover are revealed in the secrets of the beloved. And the question is, which of these two secrets is the greater occasion for revelation?

163. Love and Lack-of-love met in a garden where the lover and beloved were talking in secret. Love asked Lack-of-love with what intention he had come to that place. Lack-of-love answered that it was so the lover might cease to love, and the beloved be dishonored. The beloved and lover were very displeased by Lack-of-love's words, and they increased Love so it could conquer and destroy Lack-of-love.

164. "Tell us, fool, where do you feel your will to be stronger, in loving or in hating?" He replied, "In loving, for I have only hated in order to love."

167. The lover wanted to go to a foreign land to honor his beloved, and he wanted to disguise himself so as not to be captured on the way. But he could not hide the tears in his eyes, nor his pale and drawn face, nor the laments, thoughts, sighs, sorrow, and suffering of his heart. As a result, he was captured on his journey and delivered for torture by his beloved's enemies.

168. The lover was imprisoned in the prison of love. Thoughts, desires, and memories held and bound him so he would not escape his beloved. His longings tormented him. Patience and hope consoled him. The lover almost died, but the beloved revealed himself to him, and the lover revived.

173. The lover said, "You who love, if you need fire, come and light your lanterns at my heart. If you need water, come to my eyes that are streaming with tears. And if you need thoughts of love, come and gather them from my reflections."

182. The lover complained about his beloved for making love torment him so terribly. And the beloved defended himself by increasing his lover's hardships and dangers, thoughts, weeping, and tears.

183. "Tell us, O fool, why do you defend the guilty?" He answered, "So as not to be like the accusers who accuse the innocent along with the guilty."

186. The lover was passing through a large city, and he asked if there was someone with whom he could speak as he desired about his beloved. And he was shown a poor man who was weeping for love's sake, and who was seeking a companion with whom to speak about love.

190. "Tell us, fool! What can be best compared and found most similar?" He answered "The lover and the beloved." They asked him why. He answered "Because of the love which exists between them."

194. On a certain day the lover forgot his beloved, and on another day he remembered that he had forgotten him. On the day he remembered that he had forgotten him the lover was both in pain and sorrow because of his forgetting, and in glory and bliss because of his remembering.

198. So great was the love of the lover for his beloved that he believed everything he was told by him. And so greatly did he want to understand his beloved that everything he heard about him he wanted to understand by the light of reason. Therefore the love of the lover lay between belief and understanding.

201. "Tell us, lover, have you riches?" He replied, "Yes, I have love." "Have you poverty?" "Yes, I have love." "How is that?" "I am poor because love is no greater, and does not fill more lovers with love so as to honor the virtues of my beloved."

217. The beloved wounded his lover's heart with rods of love, to make him love the tree from which he had gathered the rods with which to strike his lovers. For this was the tree on which he had suffered death, pain, and dishonor, so that he might restore love to those lovers whom he had lost.

229. The lover said to his beloved, "O, my beloved, you have nourished my eyes and accustomed them to seeing your perfections, and my ears to hearing of them. And so my heart is accustomed to thoughts that have brought tears to my eyes and suffering to my body." The beloved answered the lover, saying that without such customs and nourishment his name would not be inscribed in the book of those going to eternal blessedness, and would not be removed from the book of the eternally damned.

231. The beloved came to dwell in the hostel of his lover. His lover made him a bed of thoughts, and sighs and tears were his servants. And the beloved paid for his stay with remembrances.

234. The lover left so as to be alone, and his heart was accompanied by thoughts, his eyes by tears, and his body by fasting and afflictions. But when the lover returned to the company of men all of the above things abandoned him, and he remained alone among the people.

235. Love is a great sea troubled by wind and waves, without port or shore. The lover perishes in the sea, and, in his peril, his torments perish and the work of his fulfillment begins.

236. "Tell us, fool, what is love?" He replied, "Love is the concordance of theory and practice towards a given end, to which the fulfillment of the lover's will is impelled, the end being to make people honor and serve his beloved. And the question is, does this end really accord with the will of the lover who desires to be with his beloved?"

237. The lover was asked who his beloved was. He replied that it was he who made him love, desire, suffer, sigh, weep, be mocked, and die.

240. The lover fell asleep, and love died, for it had nothing on which to live. The lover awoke, and love revived through the thoughts the lover sent his beloved.

244. Love tormented the lover, and he wept and complained of this torment. His beloved called to him to come to him and be healed. The nearer the lover came to his beloved, the greater were love's torments, for greater was the love he felt. But because he felt more joy the more he loved, the more effectively did the beloved heal him of his suffering.

257. The beloved planted a variety of seeds in the lover's heart, from which one plant sprouted, put forth leaves, flowered, and ripened into a single fruit. The question is, can this single fruit give rise to a variety of seeds?

262. The beloved dressed himself in the cloth in which his lover was dressed, so that he would be his companion in eternal glory. The lover therefore always wanted to wear crimson robes, so that the cloth would be more like his beloved's.

266. The lover saw the secrets of his beloved in diversity and concordance, which revealed to him the plurality and unity of his beloved, through a greater congruity of essence without contrariety.

267. They said to the lover that if decay—which is contrary to being, in that it is contrary to generation (which is contrary to nonbeing)—was eternally decaying the decayed, it would be impossible for nonbeing or end to accord with decay or the decayed. By these words the lover saw eternal generation in his beloved.

270. The lover found greater concordance between the numbers one and three than between any other numbers, because every bodily form passed from nonbeing to being by the above numbers. The lover therefore contemplated the unity and trinity of his beloved in this greater concordance of number.

277. Love and the beloved came to see the lover as he slept. The beloved called to his lover and love awakened him. And the lover obeyed love and answered his beloved.

280. And the lover was asked whether he would sell his desire. He answered that he had sold it to his beloved for a price so high that it could buy the entire world.

283. The lover drank of love at the spring of his beloved. There the beloved washed the feet of his lover, who had often forgotten and disdained his honors, because the world is in an evil state.

289. The lover was asked what was greater, possibility or impossibility. He answered that possibility was greater in created beings and impossibility in his beloved, since possibility and power are in accord, as are impossibility and actuality.

290. "Tell us, fool, which is greater, difference or concordance?" He answered that, apart from his beloved, difference was greater in plurality and concordance in unity, but that in his beloved they were equal in plurality and in unity.

297. "O, my beloved," said the lover, "to you I go and in you I go, for you call me. I go to contemplate contemplation in contemplation with contemplation of your contemplation. I am in your virtue, and I come with your virtue, which is the source of my virtue. I greet you with your

greeting, which is my greeting in your greeting, from which I hope for eternal greeting in the blessing of your blessing, in which I am blessed in my blessing."

298. "You are high, O beloved, in your heights, to which you exalt my will, exalted in your exaltation with your height. And this, in my remembrance, exalts my understanding, exalted in your exaltation to an understanding of your perfections, so that the will may then have exalted loving and memory have great remembrance."

299. "Beloved, you are the glory of my glory, and with your glory and in your glory, you give glory to my glory, which has glory from your glory. By this glory of yours I find glory equally in the pains and sufferings I endure for the honor of your glory, and the joys and thoughts that come to me from your glory."

300. "Beloved, in the prison of love you hold me enamored with your love, which has enamored me of your love, by your love and in your love. For you are nothing but love, in which you keep me alone, with the company of your love and your perfections. For you alone are in me alone, who am alone with my thoughts, since your aloneness—alone in perfection—has alone made me praise and honor its worth, without fear of those who are ungrateful, and do not have you alone in their love."

301. "Beloved, you are the solace of all solace, for in you my thoughts find solace with your solace, which is the solace and comfort of my griefs and tribulations caused by your solace, when you do not solace the ignorant with your solace, and do not increase the love of those who know your solace so they may more strongly honor your honors."

303. The lover almost drowned in the great sea of love, but he trusted in his beloved, who came to his aid with cares, tribulations, tears, and weeping, sighs, and grief. For the sea was one of love, and of honoring his honors.

313. The beloved created and the lover destroyed. The beloved judged and the lover wept. The beloved re-created glory for the lover. The beloved finished his work and the lover remained forever in the company of his beloved.

314. Along the paths of vegetation, sensation, imagination, understanding and will, the lover went seeking his beloved. Along these paths he met with dangers and sorrows for his beloved's sake, so that his understanding and will would be raised up to his beloved, who wants his lovers to understand and love him greatly.

332. With his imagination the lover painted and formed the traits of his beloved in bodily things, and with his understanding he made them shine in spiritual things, and with his will he worshipped them in all creatures.

337. The lover was sick and made out a will with the advice of his beloved. He left faults and sins to contrition and penance, and worldly joys to contempt. He bequeathed tears to his eyes, sighs and love to his heart, the traits of his beloved to his understanding, and to his memory the passion his beloved had endured for love's sake. And to his own mission he left the conversion of the infidels, who through ignorance are doomed to perdition.

340. The lover's bed lay between trials and joy. In joy he lay down to sleep and in trials he awoke. The question is, to which of the two was the bed of the lover closer?

341. The lover lay down to sleep in anger, for he feared people's blame, but he awoke in patience when he remembered the praises of his beloved. The question is, before whom did he feel greater shame, before his beloved or before the people?

342. The lover thought about death and was frightened, until he remembered the city of his beloved, the city to which death and love are the gates and entrance.

350. The lover gazed upon himself so he could be a mirror in which to behold his beloved. And he gazed upon his beloved so he could be a mirror in which he could have knowledge of himself. And the question is, to which of the two mirrors was his understanding closer?

351. Theology, Philosophy, Medicine, and Law met the lover, who asked them if they had seen his beloved. Theology wept, Philosophy doubted, Medicine and Law rejoiced. The question is, what did each of the four reactions signify to the lover in search of his beloved?

356. One day the lover was praying, and he could feel no tears coming to his eyes; and so that he might weep, he turned his thoughts to money, women, children, food, and vanity, and his understanding found that any one of the above had more people serving it than had his beloved. And at this thought his eyes filled with tears, and his soul was in sadness and pain.

361. The lover was asked in whom love was greater, in the lover who was alive or in the lover who was dying. He answered, "In the lover who is dying." "Why?" "Because love cannot be greater than in a lover who dies for love, but it can still be greater in one who lives for love."

364. The lover became drunk on the wine of memory, understanding, and love of the beloved. The beloved watered that wine with the weeping and tears of his lover.

365. Love heated and inflamed the lover with the memory of his beloved. And the beloved cooled his ardor with weeping, tears, forgetfulness of the delights of this world, and renunciation of vain honors. And love grew as

the lover remembered for whom he suffered pains and tribulations, and for whom the men of this world suffered hardships and persecution.

366. "Tell us, fool, what is this world?" He answered, "It is the prison of lovers who serve my beloved." "And who imprisons them?" He answered, "Conscience, love, fear, renunciation, contrition, and the company of wicked people. And it is hardship without reward, and is therefore punishment."

Since Blaquerna had to write a book about the *Art of Contemplation*, he decided to end *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, which is now finished to the glory and praise of Our Lord God.

Translated by Eve Bonner

POEM

Thomas Devaney

for Al Filreis

Even John Cage worked within the limits of his name.
I am only describing something—and that never stopped
Cage from introducing himself.

You have a question for the six-year-olds;
a question for all-the-same-height third graders;
a question for the spinning middle school kids
who also sing.

You have a follow-up question for the one-word answer:
yes, no, Whitman high school students;
and many questions for the I-like-it, I-don't-like it
college students—the college students.
And for openers you problematize “problematizing”
for the graduate students.

And you have a question for the adults
and many more for yourself.

Or the question you asked me—to gloss
the Wallace Stevens line:

“Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.”

And where do questions come from—
and where do they go?

“Nothing + Nothing = Something, that is ‘Nothing,’
which is really Something,” I said not knowing
where that came from. But is it all about the questions?
It's the amplitude you feel, hear, see, and
for the moment—and longer (we hope)—we feel,
hear, and see too.

I am describing you at our limits, that is, our best
failed distinctions.

As there are suppers and there are *suppers*:
a butterflied fillet of sole resting on its crunchy skin.
And it's not that you grew your beard, but
you never shaved it off, and that it continues to grow.
Your beard in its place is an invisible element
of that place—made visible.

Here is a line for not talking, which isn't silence,
(the privacy of public communion).

Here is a line for braving dark distances on foot.

Here is a line for space and classical amber bees.

And one for all the ones crossed-out.

I am only describing, as words are one way,
and walking is another.

So cross the street and step out for a walk,
one we will never take again. I am only describing something,
the way the finest grit becomes the sand we love.

And its warm color comes from whatever light there is,
even if there isn't much at all.

And old John Cage doesn't go away—new John Cages
just get added.

And where, dear John, is where?

IT, OR SOMETHING

John Ashbery

No hope for last night.

They're as much like that as anything—when I thought
of going upstairs it didn't occur to me
to stop at the landing. Even less
to walk back down, walk around
near the stairs, and then—oh why not—
go out, into the next room
or even outside. What
would be the matter with that?
All of us go out at times
and just as surely, we're glad to get back
in, where we can resume doing something
we abandoned before, some task or something,
even something quite silly if that's
the way we want it.

Strange beauty queen,

she neither slept nor swam.

There was an opulent reservoir at her door.

Many passed it admiringly,

threw stones in it, swore

to return another day when the weather

was as beautiful as it is today.

It's not certain she ever noticed it.

WELL-SCRUBBED INTERIOR

Can you walk? I asked.
Sure I can, it said. I'll walk with you a little way.
We can talk about love and play
and the ocean that is always next door.

That's not quite right I said.
Sure the ocean keeps pace with us.
It would lose our respect if it didn't.
Mainly it just wants to be here and loyal.

That's what keeps it from splashing across the planet.
I can see you now it said.
I'm glad that you are in focus,
you in and out of dreams it said.

Often one will waken in a well-scrubbed interior
and find it looks dirty, or disappointing
in some other way. Just unplanned.

One keeps coming back to that.
There was little to be said, and we have already said it.
Here, I'll take you. You can repose in my arms
for the rest of the night, which will be blue
and gloriously understaffed.

Make that notoriously understaffed.

The bench is coming undone.

I recommend it highly.

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